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# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

September 30, 2002

## NOT SO FAST

Bush is determined  
to invade Iraq ... eventually



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**Associate Publisher:** Aaron Sarver

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[shannon@inthesetimes.com](mailto:shannon@inthesetimes.com).

**Editorial correspondence and letters** should be  
sent to: 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647.  
Phone: (773) 772-0100. Fax: (773) 772-4180.  
E-mail: [itt@inthesetimes.com](mailto:itt@inthesetimes.com).

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## Editorial

# Alone at the Top

**P**roviding a decent standard of living to everyone in the world while protecting the environment from destruction and depletion of resources—the goal of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg—might seem like a utopian fantasy. But it shouldn't.

This goal could be accomplished in a reasonable period of time, even with available technology and the world's existing wealth. How? The rich countries would have to change their own technology—adopting renewable fuels and greatly increasing energy efficiency, for example—and share their know-how at low or no cost with poor countries.

The global elite would also have to share its wealth—not inconceivable when you consider that the richest 1 percent of the world earns as much as the poorest 57 percent. Such sharing would not threaten the well-being of most people in rich countries. Driving a hydrogen-powered fuel cell car, for instance, would raise the quality of life for Americans, while benefiting the rest of the world.

But the current political and economic systems—and the power and self-interest of those in control—make it extremely difficult to take advantage of these possibilities. Reflecting on progress since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan concluded that "attempts to promote human development and to reverse environmental degradation have not, in general, been effective."

Indeed, success stories are few and feeble: Reducing the number of people living on a dollar a day or less from 1.3 to 1.2 billion is good news, but hardly cause for self-congratulation. On the other hand, the social and environmental failures are stark: Global inequality is increasing, and there are growing crises of fresh water supplies and climate warming (including increases in violent weather catastrophes).

Of the many obstacles to progress on sustainable and equitable global development in the next decade, one stands out. It's the United States or, more specifically, the Bush administration and the corporate interests it serves. This was symbolized by Bush's refusal to leave his ranch vacation for even a ceremonial visit to the summit. But the U.S. government—by what it does and doesn't do—establishes barriers to sustainable development that are very real.

Before and during the event, the United States undermined progress on the summit's priorities—water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity. The Bush administration came to South Africa determined to avoid any new commitments or concrete targets for either development aid (and debt reduction) or environmental protection; to block discussion of global warming; to promote its skewed version of free trade; to encourage voluntary "partnerships" with business instead of corporate accountability; to push privatization of government and public services, such as water; to oppose targets for increasing renewable energy (urged by the European Union); and to reject the "precautionary principle" that allows restrictions on potentially harmful new technologies, such as genetically modified foods, even if their risks haven't been proven yet.

Over the past year and a half, Bush also has walked away from the Kyoto agreement on global warming (one of the major outcomes of the Rio gathering); continued government-subsidized dumping of American agricultural products (benefiting big agribusiness, not farmers, and hurting peasants around the world); proposed logging public lands under the guise of preventing forest fires; promoted an energy plan that would boost global warming emissions by 25 percent by 2010 (rather than cut them by 7 percent as Kyoto would have required); and withdrawn support for the U.N. Population Fund (endangering the lives and futures of poor women and children to placate anti-abortion extremists).

## Of the many obstacles to sustainable and equitable global development, one stands out: the Bush administration.

According to the U.N. Environmental Program, far greater progress is possible if governments would put sustainability first, instead of markets. But Bush is for markets first—and last. With its technology, wealth and influence, the United States could be showing the way forward to sustainable economics for both rich and developing countries. Tragically for the Johannesburg summit and the world's well-being, it is not only failing to lead, but sabotaging the efforts of everyone else.

—David Moberg

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## Ire for Ireland

As a longtime subscriber, I am becoming increasingly annoyed at Doug Ireland's blatant pessimism and cynicism ("Dithering Democrats," August 19). I agree, lots of things are wrong with the Democratic Party, but it's all there is standing between us and Republican control of this country. Ireland's articles cause me to wonder if that's what he really wants.

**Nick Norris**  
Chicago

I was blown away by Doug Ireland's statement that Michigan Democrat gubernatorial nominee Jennifer Granholm represents a "bright spot" this year for the Democrats. The Democrats couldn't find a more PR-bloated, right-leaning centrist in the best traditions of Clinton and Lieberman than Granholm.

She became a highly recognizable face without taking much of a position on anything. Issues of education, the environment, growing unemployment and decaying infrastructure occasionally could be found somewhere on her glossy campaign cards and in media soundbites, though I wasn't sure what she planned to do about any of them.

While winning in the state, she managed to finish dead last in largely African-American Detroit—behind Jim Blanchard and the genuinely progressive and outspoken Congressman David Bonior, who was supported overwhelmingly by the state's unions, including the UAW.

As for me, I am going to pull the lever this November for Green gubernatorial nominee Douglas Campbell, the only true bright spot in Michigan this year.

**Alex Hogan**  
Detroit

## Smarter Greens

You guys are usually smart, but you are not putting two and two together with the Ed McGaa situation ("Third Time's the Challenge," August 19). The Greens had to place a candidate on the ballot, so they picked an unknown, elderly, rural, conservative veteran, maybe the only Green in America guaranteed to take more votes away from the Republican.

Why couldn't they just endorse Paul Wellstone? Because it's against the law. The New Party tried to fight this in the past, took their case to the Supreme Court—and lost.

So what did the Greens do? They conspired to create a campaign guaranteed to protect their ballot line, while doing the least amount

of harm to Wellstone. McGaa hasn't even raised the \$5,000 to register with the FEC.

Sure, if you ask Greens, they'll say McGaa is in favor of many Green things and that Wellstone has disappointed them in some ways—and that's true. But they're not saying they're trying to make Wellstone lose. Hell, Green leaders like former Minneapolis City Council member Jim Niland are running Wellstone's campaign!

The Greens could have run big names like Winona LaDuke, or a Green City Council member (they have two in Minneapolis), or a well-known, Green-leaning Democrat like gubernatorial contender Becky Lourey. They refused. They're not stupid.

**Brad Anderson**  
Minneapolis

## Human Needs

James North faults Bernard Lewis for using a musical metaphor to suggest the democratic failures of Arabs and Muslims ("All the Rage," August 19). Lewis offends North by failing to chant a fundament of progressive orthodoxy: "Deep in our hearts, we are all democrats."

But to resolve conflict, it is indispensable to determine "the needs" of the aggrieved. This definition of need is a prerequisite of meaningful compromise. What does al Qaeda need? What does Hamas need? What does the Taliban need? What does Saddam Hussein need? What does Saudi royalty need? Is it democracy?

It is possible—if not probable—that al Qaeda, Hamas, the Taliban, Saddam and the

Saudis need raw power to maintain an anachronistic system that directly contradicts democracy. I make these observations while recognizing that Israeli repression slams the Palestinian people daily, and that Arab anachronism may be preferable to totalitarian globalization.

**Alan Archibald**  
Hillsborough, North Carolina

## Support the Refusers

As an activist in the movement for a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians, I was very happy to see the article by Mary Abowd on the refuser movement ("Hell No, They Won't Go," August 19). I was disappointed, however, that she did not mention our campaign here in the United States, or our efforts to mobilize Americans—and American Jews—to support the refusers. For those readers who feel, as I do, that the refusers are among the most important voices of the Israeli peace movement and want to help strengthen those voices, I suggest that they visit <http://www.refusersolidarity.net>.

**Steven Feuerstein**  
Refuser Solidarity Network  
Chicago

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2040 N. Milwaukee Ave.  
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Or e-mail: [irt@inthesetimes.com](mailto:irt@inthesetimes.com)

**Terry LaBan**





## Full Court Press

Judges lambast Justice Dept., but 9/11 detainees still sit in jail, or worse

By Geov Parrish

An August 26 federal appeals court ruling in Cincinnati signaled the latest strong rebuke of the Bush administration's handling of civil liberties and public disclosure in the cases of September 11 detainees. But while a series of cases on Justice Department and INS policies wend their way through the courts, scores of detainees remain in legal limbo, imprisoned, often isolated, and facing deportation.

The Cincinnati ruling, issued unanimously by a three-judge panel for the Sixth District Court of Appeals, applied only to a single case—that of Rabih Haddad, a Muslim clergyman who had overstayed his tourist visa. Four Michigan newspapers and Democratic Rep. John Conyers Jr. had filed suit challenging a September 21, 2001, order by Chief Immigration Judge Michael J. Creppy, issued at the request of Attorney General John Ashcroft, that closed immigration hearings deemed by the INS to threaten national security.

This month in Philadelphia, a federal appeals court will hear a government appeal of a broader case on the same issues, in which a lower court judge in Newark ordered the government to open all such hearings to the public unless it could offer case-by-case proof of the need for secrecy.

The Sixth District case, the Newark decision and an August 2 ruling by U.S. District Judge Gladys Kessler ordering the release of the names of all people detained in post-9/11 investigations—an order Kessler later stayed pending government appeal—all directed unusually harsh language toward the Bush administration policies.

Citing an opinion used as precedent, Kessler wrote, "Secret arrests are 'a concept odious to a democratic society' and profoundly antithetical to the bedrock values that characterize a free and open one such as ours." Judge Damon J. Keith, in the Cincinnati ruling, wrote that "democracies die behind closed doors."

An August 16 ruling in the case of Yaser Esam Hamdi, a Muslim captured in

Afghanistan who (along with alleged "dirty bomber" Jose Padilla) is one of two U.S. citizens known to be imprisoned indefinitely and without charges, drew even harsher language from U.S. District Judge Robert Doumar. Ordering the government to provide more information on why Hamdi should be considered an "enemy combatant" without the rights generally accorded citizens, the judge noted that the case "appears to be the first in American jurisprudence where an American citizen has been held incommunicado and subjected to indefinite detention without charges, without any finding by a military tribunal, and without access to a lawyer."

But despite these widely reported condemnations, Hamdi remains in prison. So do Rabih Haddad and at least 80 other men. In the most recent public estimate, the Justice Department said in a July 3 letter to Sen. Carl Levin (D-Michigan) that 81 individuals were still in custody. The same letter reported that as of May 29, 611 INS detainees had at least one closed hearing, out of a total of 752 detained overall in connection with 9/11 investigations. Those numbers are substantially at odds with earlier Justice Department statements that up to 1,200 people had been detained.

Levin has yet to get answers to additional questions—such as why so many individuals were detained, whether any of them actually have links to terror organizations (let alone to the 9/11 attack), or the present status of the more than 600 men brought before secret INS courts since 9/11. Many are believed to have been deported to their native countries, mostly in the Middle East and South Asia.

For the scores still remaining—most facing deportation to authoritarian countries—time is not on their side. As with the "enemy combatants" being held in



Protesters rally in support of Rabih Haddad in Michigan hours before a judge ruled against secret deportation hearings.

Guantanamo Bay, the INS detainees continue to be held, and tried, in secret, often without access to either legal counsel or the evidence against them, and often on the pretext of minor visa violations.

Still another setback to Ashcroft's post-9/11 policies came August 22 in Washington, when the secretive federal court that oversees approval of government spying on terror suspects published—for the first time in two decades—an opinion rejecting proposed new procedures by the attorney general.

The court, which oversees the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), found that Department of Justice and FBI officials had supplied erroneous information to the court in more than 75 previous applications for search warrants and wiretaps in the past two years, many of them predating 9/11. The opinion explicitly expressed a fear that Ashcroft's policies could engender further abuses. Both the ruling and its public announcement were widely seen as a stinging rebuke to



Bush administration policies regarding civil liberties and increased cooperation between intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

At press time, the government was awaiting the Philadelphia ruling before deciding whether to appeal the Sixth District decision overturning Judge Creppy's September 2001 order. Outside the district's four states his order remains in effect, essentially closing INS administrative hearings to anyone without national security clearance—which judges and INS prosecutors generally have, and which reporters, defense attorneys and defendants generally do not.

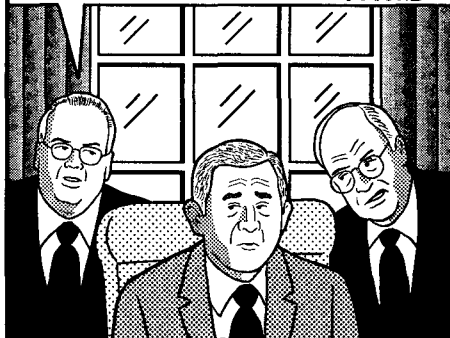
Meanwhile, no court rulings have yet challenged the indefinite detention of U.S. citizens such as Hamdi, and the only way for the public to know how many more such prisoners might exist is through information from the Justice Department itself.

Without exception, Ashcroft's department has condemned the negative court rulings. In its appeal of Judge Kessler's public disclosure ruling, for example, Justice lawyers argued that releasing the names of detainees "would give unfair advantage to terrorists." ■

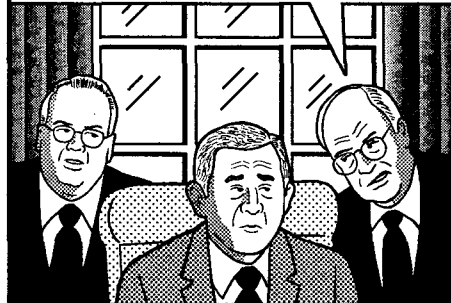
## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

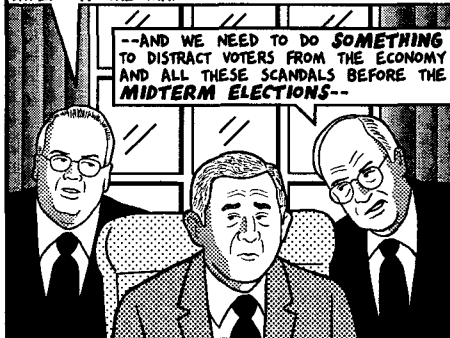
WE HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO EVIDENCE LINKING THEM TO 9-11 OR AL QAEDA--OR EVEN ANY PROOF THAT THEY PLAN TO AID TERRORISTS IN THE FUTURE--



--AND AN INVASION OF THIS MAGNITUDE WILL INEVITABLY COST THOUSANDS OF LIVES ON BOTH SIDES-- ENRAGE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES--AND GENERALLY MAKE US A PARIAH IN THE COURT OF WORLD OPINION--



--BUT FRANKLY, MOST AMERICANS WOULD BE PERFECTLY HAPPY TO SEE THE WHOLE DAMN COUNTRY WIPED OFF THE MAP--



--AND WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING TO DISTRACT VOTERS FROM THE ECONOMY AND ALL THESE SCANDALS BEFORE THE MIDTERM ELECTIONS--

--SO IT'S SETTLED! COME OCTOBER--WE'RE ATTACKING FRANCE!!



IT MAKES AS MUCH SENSE AS INVADING IRAQ--

--AND IT'S A HELL OF A LOT MORE CONVENIENT!

I NEVER LIKED THOSE SNOOTY BAGUETTE-EATERS ANYWAY!!

## Mazen Al-Najjar Deported

Mazen Al-Najjar, a stateless Palestinian who was held on secret evidence for more than three and a half years by the U.S. government, was finally deported in August.

After his initial release in 2000, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents again arrested Al-Najjar outside his home in Tampa, Florida in November 2001. Though officially he was detained for overstaying his student visa in the '80s, many of his supporters and friends believe he was arrested as part of a crackdown on civil liberties in the wake of the attacks of September 11. "The re-detention of Al-Najjar is an exercise of raw government power that serves no legitimate

purpose," said Randall Marshall, Legal Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida.

In public statements, Bush administration officials continued to use innuendo to link Al-Najjar to terrorism, even though the courts had cleared him of any such connections after looking at the government's evidence. In arguing that Al-Najjar should be detained, federal prosecutor Douglas Ginsberg called Al-Najjar's case "an issue of great national importance." According to the ACLU, "the Department of Justice said that his detention demonstrated its 'commitment to address[ing] terrorism.'"

"The whole case happened as a government reaction to an individual practicing his First

Amendment freedom of expression," Al-Najjar said in an interview in 2000, after the INS determined it no longer had any basis to hold him.

After many months of working to find a country that would take him, Al-Najjar was granted a two-week tourist visa by Bahrain. But then Bahrain refused to let his flight land. The plane was rerouted to Ireland and then Italy before Al-Najjar was finally allowed to land in Beirut, Lebanon, on August 24. According to the *St. Petersburg Times*, the federal agents who accompanied Al-Najjar "took off in their chartered jet so fast they didn't know whether Lebanese authorities would allow him to stay in the country."

Al-Najjar's brother-in-law, Sami Al-Arian, said Al-Najjar has since been granted permission to move to another country, though he could not publicly disclose its name. Al-Najjar's wife, Fedaa Al-Najjar, is also facing deportation. She and their three daughters, who are U.S. citizens, hope to join Al-Najjar if they can obtain a visa, according to the *St. Petersburg Times*, but "there is no guarantee when, or if, a reunion will take place."

After landing in Lebanon, Al-Najjar said: "I think the standard of civil rights is not the same as it used to be one year ago. I hope people who believe in the Constitution and civil rights will stand up and keep their eyes open and point out what can happen."

—Anthony Arnove



## Hollow Victory

### Afghanistan struggles out of the rubble

By Anne E. Brodsky

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN—It takes 10 hours for a Toyota Corolla taxi to traverse the 140 miles of rutted and rock-strewn road from Peshawar to Kabul. At rates of speed that seem impossible in such conditions, the driver weaves back and forth to avoid the worst dangers—hairpin turns on mountain passes with no retaining walls; car-sized holes in bridges marked only by small clusters of stones. Even traveling through this very small corner of eastern Afghanistan eight months after the Taliban was defeated, the vast challenges to reconstructing the country are apparent.

The shelled remains of deserted villages sit next to fallow fields, broad stretches of countryside are contaminated with one of the highest concentration of land mines in the world, and riverbeds are bone dry after four years of drought. Young boys with Kalashnikovs stop cars at random checkpoints. Children and men beg for a thousand Afghanis (the equivalent of two cents) as they do their part for the reconstruction, shoveling dirt into holes in the road.

Meanwhile, intricately painted Pakistani trucks bearing the possessions of returning refugees make their way to the repatriation and welcome center at the edge of Kabul, where the collection of tents looks eerily similar to the refugee



An ailing Afghan man lies in his tent at a refugee camp in the village of Estalif.

camps many left on the other side of the border. Throughout all of these scenes, one rarely sees even the burqa-clad form of the supposedly liberated women of Afghanistan.

In Kabul, the International Security Assistance Force keeps a heavily armed watch while the reconstruction of roads leading to ISAF and U.S. bases, NGO offices and Northern Alliance-affiliated buildings makes steady progress. Cabs filled with foreign relief workers clog the

streets. But while the rent wars between these foreign arrivals have driven prices in some neighborhoods to an astronomical \$5,000 a month, the average Kabul citizen lives among the destruction that stands largely unchanged since the 1992 to 1996 civil war, when the Northern Alliance last controlled and destroyed the city. In many neighborhoods, if the wires weren't stolen in the previous war, electricity operates only every other night. Ready access to clean water and proper sanitation are luxuries.

At Malalai Girls School, once one of the premier high schools in the city, the girls are back to school, but most of them are five years behind grade level. The library books were destroyed by the Taliban; the science labs have no equipment; and despite their dark, fully covering new school uniforms, many girls still don a burqa to make it safely home. They and their families fear a repeat of the kidnappings, rapes and forced marriages girls and women suffered the last time the Northern Alliance had control of Kabul. The ominous trucks with dark-tinted windows and no license plates, full of leering, armed Northern Alliance soldiers, do nothing to allay their fears.

Returnees with masters' degrees as well as their uneducated manual laborer neighbors both complain that jobs are unavailable unless you are Panjshiri, like the former Northern Alliance, or can pay a bribe. As of the end of July, the U.N. high commissioner for refugees was reporting that some 1.3 million refugees have already returned to Afghanistan; another 700,000, he says, will return by the end of this year. From their temporary

## IN SHORT

### Good Schools at the Grassroots

While Pennsylvania has adopted privatization as a solution for failing schools in Philadelphia, a statewide grassroots campaign called Good Schools Pennsylvania has been working hard to promote its own ideas for improving underperforming schools. Changing the way schools are managed, they say, has not boosted student achievement anywhere in the nation. "Only state leaders use the word 'reform' for the activities they are forcing on the Philadelphia school district," says Donna Cooper, the group's program director.

Instead, Good Schools Pennsylvania focuses on the state's biggest problem: inequity in public funding. Currently, the highest-spending district dishes out \$14,406 per student, while the lowest spends just \$5,302. Because Pennsylvania provides only 35 percent of funding for public edu-

cation, the rest of the money must come from property taxes.

Poor areas, then, cannot raise as much money as their wealthier neighbors. The group has been lobbying for changes in the tax system to eliminate such inequities, saying all schools should have access to methods proven to improve students' performance—all-day kindergarten, pre-kindergarten, smaller class size and advanced technology.

The changes in Philadelphia have given Good Schools Pennsylvania a small boost in dealing with the legislature. As part of the plan to privatize schools, the secretary of education has increased funding by \$1,500 per student in the city. But overall, Cooper considers the upheaval in Philadelphia a "sideshow"—a distraction from the bigger issue. "While we are all screaming about privatization," she says, "we won't solve the funding inequality in public education."

BY JULIA FUMA



homes in the windowless cement shells of commercial vending stalls, recent returnees talk of better times in the refugee camps in Pakistan. There, at least, they received some basic help. They wonder if they will have to flee again when the weather gets cold.

Meanwhile, after the assassination of two high-ranking officials in the new Afghan government, President Hamid Karzai's Afghan Security Force was replaced with U.S. special forces this summer. As of September, the U.S. State Department will take over Karzai's security for a year. Despite reports of armed conflict between rival warlords and rapes, murders and lack of security in many parts of the rest of the country, the U.S. administration has been one of the prime opponents of an expansion of peacekeepers outside of Kabul, despite the repeated requests of Karzai, his ministers and the people of Afghanistan.

But the stark realities of life in post-Taliban Afghanistan are not dampening

the spirit and resistance of the Afghan people. After 24 years of war and destruction, they have grown unfortunately accustomed to the fact that the promises of liberation and rebirth offered by regime after regime—from the Soviets and their Afghan collaborators, to the Taliban and the current government, with its heavy contingent of fundamentalist warlords—have never been realized.

But they still believe, sometimes amazingly, that the average person can make a difference, and there is the sense that everyone feels the excitement of that potential. "The main problem is the level of need the people have," a nurse working on a mobile health care team in Kabul says. "Whatever we can do, there is always more and more needed. But at least we feel some freedom after the Taliban, and people are happy for that. If we can keep helping and caring about people, then that will be a success."

Indigenous organizations like the Revolutionary Association of the Women

of Afghanistan, or RAWA, while they continue to document abuses and advocate for a secular democracy and human rights for women and all Afghans, are expanding their work—teaching literacy courses to increasing numbers of women, running income-generating projects for widows and beggars, and providing food, cooking oil and medical care to the needy.

The group is still an underground organization, and still at risk. But they are optimistic. "In any situation we didn't stop or decrease our work, even under the most oppressive conditions—Soviets, jihadis, Taliban, U.S. bombing," one member says. "The goals for Afghanistan may not be achieved in a very short period, but our experience over the past 25 years makes us sure that in the future we will see success." ■

Anne E. Brodsky's book *With All Our Strength: The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan is forthcoming from Routledge next spring.*

## ((( (( (( (( (( APPALL-O-METER ))) )))) ))))

### Royally Screwed 4.6

A lot of people lost their shirts when the Internet bubble burst, but only the king of Tonga can blame it on his court jester. King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV blew some \$26 million—half his kingdom's annual revenues—on bad investments. Now he's suing his court jester, a former account manager at Bank of America in San Francisco, claiming that the fool scammed him.

The knave in question is Jesse Bogdonoff, a Californian and dabbler in "wellness" cures. He met the king while managing his account at Bank of America, and later accepted a position in the royal court. By ancient tradition, court jesters get away with *lese-majesty*, and so likely will Bogdonoff. But to hear this one open his mouth—"The jester has so many implications for the human psyche," he babbled to the *Independent*, "For me, it now represents the divine fool"—is to understand how he might justly rot in a dungeon.

### Biblical Thumping 7.3

Florida truly is, as one of its native wits once put it, the lint trap of human folly. Gov. Jeb Bush has appointed as head of the state's child welfare agency a man who has written approvingly of "biblical spanking." Jerry Regier, the public servant in question, wrote an essay in 1989 arguing that "temporary and superficial bruises or welts do not constitute child abuse." According to the *Miami Herald*, in the same essay Regier also denounced religious intermarriage, opined that men really should wear the pants in the family, and characterized work by women outside the home as "bondage."

Meanwhile, a new state law requires some pregnant women who want to put their children up for adoption to essentially publish their sexual histories in the newspaper. A woman who wants to give

up her child must first notify the child's father, reports the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*. If she cannot identify the father, she must make an exhaustive effort to notify possible fathers, including placing notices in local papers. In the notice, she must list her name, any possible fathers, and the date and locality of conception.

### News That Fits 5.2

On August 20, observant Chicagoans were invited to ponder journalistic objectivity as they walked to work. Passing by a *Tribune* vending machine, they might have read this headline: "Rich '90s failed to lift all: Income

disparity between races widened greatly, census analysis shows." Meanwhile, a few steps away, the *Sun-Times* boxes blared "Boom Shared by All Races in Chicago."

That marks something of a role reversal at the city's dailies. The *Tribune*, once a redoubt of rock-ribbed Republicanism, now advocates for those the good times left behind. The *Sun-Times*, the traditional paper of labor and the Democrats, now channels the will of the hard-right Canadian press magnate "Lord" Conrad Black.



## Not Quite Millions

Reparations movement marches on after D.C. rally

By Salim Muwakkil

WASHINGTON—The “Millions for Reparations” rally held August 17 on the National Mall failed to pull even a fraction of the numbers implied in its title. But the event’s black nationalist organizers weren’t as concerned with crowd size as with reasserting control of what was once an obscure movement to compensate African-Americans for the horrors endured by their enslaved forbears. Once a marginal concern of the black nationalist fringes, that effort has become a national bandwagon.

The small crowd assembled at the event—4,500 at most—was drawn from around the country, with the bulk coming from Chicago and New York, the respective headquarters of the National Black United Front and the December 12 Movement, the event’s two primary organizers. The rally idea emerged from the so-called Durban 400, a group named for the number of African-Americans who attended the U.N. World Conference against Racism last year in Durban, South Africa, and successfully pushed to have the trans-Atlantic slave trade designated a crime against humanity.

A wide array of black nationalist affiliations were showcased, triggering memories of rallies two decades past in which black power slogans and Pan-Africanist symbols dominated. On hand were members of old-school organizations, like the late Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which reached its peak in the ’20s, and new-school groups like the New Black Panthers, who patrolled the parameter of the protest with paramilitary swagger.

Exotic groups with names like the Temple of the Black Messiah and Allah’s Black Army also showed up. Strident calls for “Gettin’ Paid,” “It’s Pay Day” and “pin the tale on the honky” boomed through gigantic loudspeakers. A number of Trotskyite groups took the opportunity to proselytize, but few in the crowd seemed interested in the impassioned words of the



Lindi Bobb, 6, stands next to signs advertising August’s rally for slavery reparations.

white leftists. A group of about 20 whites, called Caucasians United for Reparations and Emancipation (CURE), seemed a bit more popular.

The date of August 17 was chosen because it was the 115th anniversary of the birth of nationalist icon Garvey. The insistent focus on ideology inhibited the participation of the more mainstream reparations exponents. There was no Randall Robinson, whose popular 2000 book, *The Debt: What America Owes To Blacks*, made believers out of many readers. There was no sign of Charles J. Ogletree, the Harvard law professor who is leading a team of high-powered lawyers (including Johnnie Cochran) called the Reparations Assessment Group to prepare a lawsuit seeking reparations.

Nation of Islam chief Louis Farrakhan was the best-known black leader to address the group. He cautioned the movement not to be content with mere monetary payback, but to demand transfers of land as well. “We cannot accept a cash payment because a fool and his money will soon part,” Farrakhan said.

A few politicians attended the rally, but none of those who helped pass resolutions supporting reparations in the cities of Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit and Dallas were on hand. The focus of most of those municipal resolutions is to urge support for HR 40, legislation annu-

ally introduced by Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-Michigan) that seeks to “establish a commission to examine the institution of slavery and economic discrimination against African-Americans” and “to make recommendation to the Congress on appropriate remedies.” Conyers was at the rally, and he urged the crowd to badger their congressional representatives about passing his bill. “Only Congress can do what we want done,” he said.

Despite the small crowd and the sectarian tenor of the August 17 rally, organizers declared victory. “We accomplished our major objective,” says Conrad Worrill, chair of the National Black United Front. “We brought people from 66 cities and 38 states here and brought unprecedented national attention to the issue of reparations. Our grassroots movement made unprecedented demands on the U.S. government right in front of the Capitol building, which was built by slave labor.”

The rally may have had a disappointing turnout, but the effort to compensate the progeny of enslaved Africans has become a full-blown movement. In addition to the municipal resolutions, some groups have initiated court action. Earlier this year, a class action suit was filed against FleetBoston Financial Corporation, Aetna Insurance and railroad operator CSX seeking reparations for the profits of slavery on behalf of slave descendants.



The suit, filed on behalf of 35 million African-Americans, accuses the companies of human rights violations, unjust enrichment from their corporate predecessors' roles in the slave trade and conversion of the value of the slaves' labor into profit. Two groups, the International Human Rights Association of American Minorities and All for Reparations and Emancipation, are also working internationally: They have gained NGO and observer status at the United Nations and argued the case for African-American reparations before the international body.

A CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll conducted last February revealed that 57 percent of blacks surveyed support the reparations concept, while 84 percent of whites oppose it. But there are some signs support is even picking up among white Americans. One indication of that growing support was a remarkable editorial in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published in May of last year. "Slavery and the century of government-sanctioned discrimination that followed were national policies that denied fundamental rights—justice, equality, freedom—to African-Americans," the editorial

board wrote. "It will take a national effort to answer for that."

As the *Inquirer* made clear, arguments favoring reparations are strong when well presented. Unfortunately, the Millions for Reparations rally failed that test. ■

## You Can't Do That

### Court blocks anti-environmental rule changes

By Ken Ward Jr.

CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA—A federal judge has again blocked the coal industry from continuing to bury miles of Appalachian streams beneath waste rock and dirt.

On May 8, U.S. District Judge Charles H. Haden II ordered the Army Corps of Engineers to stop issuing most new permits for mountaintop removal valley fills. In doing so, Haden handed citizen activists another major victory and rebuffed the

Bush administration's efforts to help coal companies legalize further destruction of streams. "Judge Haden's decision is based on a common-sense and straightforward reading of the Clean Water Act," says Jim Hecker of Trial Lawyers for Public Justice. "Congress never intended to allow companies to use the nation's streams for waste disposal."

Before Haden's injunction, that's just what coal companies had been doing for years—with the approval of the corps, the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Office of Surface Mining and other regulatory agencies.

In mountaintop removal mining, coal operators explode entire hilltops to uncover valuable, low-sulfur coal reserves. Huge bulldozers and shovels shove waste rock and earth left over from the mining into nearby valleys, burying streams. These waste piles, called valley fills, grew dramatically in size and number as strip mining mechanized. In 2000 alone, the corps approved permits to bury 85 miles of streams in southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky. Under Haden's ruling, these corps permits are illegal.

## IN PERSON

BY BRETT SCHAEFFER

# The Education President

**A**s the new head of the nation's largest teachers union, Reg Weaver has wasted little time critiquing President Bush's education plan. Elected in July as president of the National Education Association, Weaver says the federal legislation sweeping through the nation's schools was created without input from the very people charged with carrying out the reform effort—teachers. And he has few kind words for the recent Supreme Court decision that upheld the use of vouchers in Cleveland's public school system. A voucher program, says the 62-year-old Weaver, is "a ticket to nowhere."

Since 1996, Weaver has been vice president of the NEA, which

represents about 2.7 million teachers and other school workers nationwide. A science teacher from suburban Chicago, Weaver is something of a union pioneer. In 1981, he became the first African-American elected president of the 115,000-member Illinois Education Association, an NEA affiliate.

In *These Times* spoke with Weaver in August.

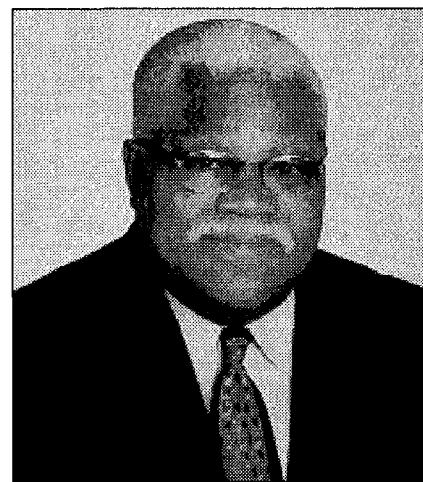
### What are the NEA's primary goals?

What we do is try to restore the public's confidence in public education, and we try to do that by making sure all children have access to a quality public education that is free from intimidation and harassment and has an atmosphere that is conducive to

good teaching and learning. ... We want all schools to be as good as our best schools. Those are the kinds of things we want, and I think those are the kinds of things that parents want, and that most policy-makers want for their schools and the children they serve.

### What are your concerns regarding President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" legislation?

There were about four people who wrote the law. The NEA had very little input in terms of the original law.



Reg Weaver

In addition, funding is not where it needs to be. States have mandates without funding.

In early May, the Bush administration had tried to work its way around the Clean Water Act by simply changing its definition of "fill material" to include mountaintop removal waste (see "Fat King Coal," April 15). Less than a week later, Haden dropped his bombshell: The judge said that the Clean Water Act itself prohibits most valley fills, so the Bush rule change was irrelevant. "The practice is contrary to law, not because the agencies said so, although their longstanding regulations correctly forbade it," the judge wrote. "The regulators' practice is illegal because it is contrary to the spirit and the letter of the Clean Water Act."

Coal industry officials have attacked the May 8 decision as the end of all mining. "The ruling is devastating," says Bill Raney, president of the West Virginia Coal Association. In an appeal brief filed August 19, the Kentucky Coal Association said that Haden's ruling would "strangle" the Appalachian coal industry. But citizen environmental activists have cited the preliminary findings of a broad federal government study on mountaintop removal, which suggest



DEAN SMITH / OHWEC.ORG

A mountaintop removal site in West Virginia.

that Haden's ruling would actually improve the economy by ensuring long-term development of former mining sites.

The Bush administration and the industry have appealed the ruling anyway,

setting up another legal battle this fall at the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Virginia. The administration is also dragging its feet on the release of the mountaintop removal study. Under a court settlement, the report was supposed to be issued by December 2000. During a visit to West Virginia in July, Interior Secretary Gale Norton said it wouldn't be out until at least February 2003.

For his part, Haden seems to expect another outcry by industry and its friends in the Bush administration. "The Court," Haden wrote in his ruling, "is aware of the immense political and economic pressures on the agencies to continue to approve mountaintop removal coal mining valley fills for waste disposal, and to give assurances that future legal challenges to the practice will fail."

"Some may believe that reasonably priced energy from coal companies requires cheap disposal of the vast amounts of waste material created when mountaintops are removed to get at the natural resource," the judge continued. "Congress, did not, however, authorize cheap waste disposal when it passed the Clean Water Act." ■

## IN PERSON

The act calls for having a qualified, certified teacher in every classroom by 2006. Nobody wants that any more than we do. It's an admirable goal. But how are we going to do it? Parents need to know there is no funding for that. These policies sound good, but are the resources there? At this time, no.

This law is very far-reaching, and, in some ways, it can be very intrusive. I think there are some early advisories from the Department of Education that call for the law to supersede collective bargaining agreements. If that is true, and the administration interprets it that way, then sparks will fly. There are state teachers associations that have fought for years to gain collective bargaining; they're not about to sit back and allow those rights to be eroded without a fight.

**Last year, NEA-affiliated teachers unions in four states pushed for legislative changes that would expand collective bargaining laws to include traditionally un-negotiable topics, such as curriculum choice and textbook selection. The measures won in Maryland and Tennessee, but lost in Connecticut and California. What do you take from that?**

I think it's a good thing those states put forward the opportunity to expand collective bargaining. I think that it's important we have an opportunity to participate in the issues that affect our workplace. When people feel they have a say in the selection of something, then they have more ownership. I believe if those kinds of things were afforded educators more, they would have more ownership, rather than having something

just mandated to them by somebody who thinks they know what needs to be done.

**What about critics who argue the unions are roadblocks to reform?**

That's an overused argument, and it doesn't hold water. The teachers unions are not responsible for blocking reform; the teachers unions are responsible for standing up for what they believe would be a detriment to the environment in which they work. There's nothing wrong with standing up for what you believe in as an educator, as a professional, as a practitioner, if, in fact, you see something that's going to potentially damage the system. Why would you not speak out against it?

**Where does the union stand on vouchers?**

We have spoken out and will continue to speak out against vouchers. We feel that they are a detriment for all kids. They haven't worked anywhere they've been tried. ... What we talk about is making sure that all children have access to a quality education ... and vouchers do not allow that for all children.

If, just because we speak out against vouchers, we're automatically seen as blocking reform—well, if that is the case, then yeah, we are blocking it. Because vouchers are not in the best interest of all children. ... I would say that those who want to point their finger at the teachers unions should turn around and look at themselves. What are they doing to make it possible for all children—not just some—to have access to a quality public education? ■



# The End of the Illusion

By Susan J. Douglas

**A**wash in bathos. That's what the media promise to be before, during and after the anniversary of 9/11: Tom Brokaw reliving the day with air traffic controllers. John Walsh of *America's Most Wanted* (now host of his own talk show) at Ground Zero with relatives of the victims. Flight 93 widow Lisa Beamer ... well, everywhere, from the *Today Show* to *Good Morning America* to *Larry King Live*.

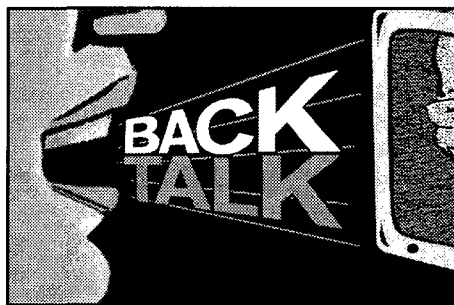
As always, in the construction of collective memory, certain images and interpretive frameworks will be reiterated and magnified. Others will be tinier than a bat squeak. (For example, as of this writing, I do not know of plans for a retrospective documentary of the past year produced and hosted by the American Civil Liberties Union.) But if progressives could get an hour or two on TV, what interpretive frameworks might we put forward as we think about what has happened here since last September?

I think one of the most important, and chilling, developments of the past year has been the Bush administration's unashamed embrace of neoliberalism, the term lefty academics in particular use to describe the American political system of at least the past 50 years. Neoliberalism refers to a government that has all the requisite trappings of a democracy—legislatures, public campaigns, national conventions, elections—but is really a highly unrepresentative government by elites for elites.

Since most Americans don't want to admit out loud that they live in a plutocracy, successful politicians have, until

now, worked hard to keep up an illusion. Bill Clinton was a master at this: His moving rhetoric about the needs of children, or affirmative action, or the crisis in health care, all masked his administration's all-too-frequent cultivation of conservatives and capitulation to business interests.

But Bush, Cheney and Ashcroft don't care about maintaining the illusion, and have decided they don't need the trap-



pings of democracy. After all, that's how they won the presidency. If you review the last year, you will see a carefully calibrated process to achieve a real paradigm shift in gaining American acceptance of the less candy-coated aspects of neoliberal politics.

Because 9/11 allowed Bush to become a "wartime president," and wars are always a time of impinged democracy, this has been an especially propitious 12-month period in which to convince the country to acquiesce to autocracy. The campaign has had several important phases: undermine civil liberties (and see if anyone cares), insist on a highly arrogant foreign policy (and see if anyone cares), stonewall about administration officials' highly profitable adventures in the corporate Eden of the pre-Enron days (and see if anyone cares), and then substitute a series of "leaks" for public debate about whether the president should, on his own, declare war against Iraq (and see if anyone cares).

Step by step, they've used the "all war, all the

time" version of the presidency to push people to the next level of consent, relying on coercion when necessary. It helps, of course, that the opposition party is a bunch of spineless weenies.

The USA Patriot Act was the first crucial move. But we know this year's depressing history: the detaining of thousands of Muslims and Arabs, often for months, without charges; the proposal of a national ID system; the Justice Department plan to fingerprint and track immigrants; the expansion of the FBI's ability (which we now learn doesn't even have e-mail!) to spy on religious and political groups; the undermining and evading of the Freedom of Information Act; and, everyone's favorite, the National Neighborhood Watch program (in which your TIPS on the weird guy down the street will go directly to *America's Most Wanted*).

While the TIPS program has been widely ridiculed, it has helped deflect attention away from the other serial assaults on democracy. And once people have said "uncle" to increased power and secrecy among law enforcement and the federal

**If progressives could get an hour or two on TV, what would we put forward about what has happened since 9/11?**

government, why should they blanch when the president says that people should certainly be "allowed" (his word) to debate the merits of a war with Iraq—but that, in the end, he'll decide on his own what to do.

Given how effectively this administration has naturalized top-down power, is it a surprise that Al Gore—I mean, *Al Gore*—has been accused of running too populist a campaign in 2000?

Looking back at the last year from this perspective would indeed be bracing. It would also be denounced as unpatriotic. So you won't hear any of this coming from Lisa Beamer or any of the other icons of 9/11. In fact, the anniversary, through an avalanche of patriotic symbols that celebrate the image but not the substance of democracy, will only advance the surrender to neoliberalism, Bush-style. ■

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# Estranged Bedfellows

By Ana Marie Cox

**W**hen President Bush appointed Colin Powell as secretary of state, the praise from the right could hardly have been louder. "Men like Colin Powell," cooed the *Washington Times* editorial page, "represent, for every human community, excellence, intellect and capacity."

Much of the American public still feels this way. With an approval rating of 75 percent, Powell is more popular than any other member of the administration, including the president, whose approval lags behind at 65 percent and shrinking. And with 34 percent giving Powell an "excellent" rating, compared to 24 percent for Bush, most Americans, not unreasonably, are more confident in Powell's ability to do his job than they are in the president's ability to do his.

Now, an uncharacteristically public split over invading Iraq has forced many of Powell's formerly enthusiastic supporters to choose sides. Powell's reservations about the invasion have been rather obliquely stated—he told a congressional committee in June that Iraq was simply more likely to use its weapons on its neighbors than on the United States. And after Dick Cheney's warmongering speech in late August, a Powell spokesman said, "We're doing our utmost ... to get U.N. inspectors back to Iraq."

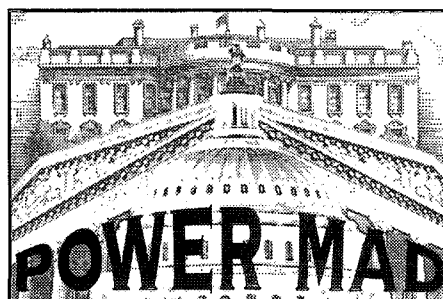
This kind of subtle insubordination—plus the exclusion of Powell from the August "military strategy session" at the president's ranch—has convinced Iraq hardliners that Powell's opposition to an invasion is more than simply diplomatic reserve.

One *National Review* author has already proclaimed that "bringing Powell into the cabinet will ... come to be seen as a classic error." And more rabid rightists were grumbling months ago about Powell subverting his boss' political agenda with his temperate stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as his support of affirmative action and reproductive choice. Considering the White House's almost Nixonian obsession with loyalty, could Powell's days be numbered?

No conservative commentator has called for the secretary's resignation yet. Perhaps

they realize Powell's calm competence provides an important counterweight to the president's reckless foreign policy statements. More likely, they recognize how important the popular Powell is to shoring up the GOP's weak appeal to black voters.

When the *New York Times* reported in July that Powell's position was shaky, cho-



uses of administration officials insisted that the president wasn't considering his departure. Powell himself told reporters he wasn't even thinking about resigning.

But perhaps he should.

Despite their coyness, it's clear the hawks see Powell's presence as one of the few real obstacles to an invasion—violating the War Powers Act being, apparently, the diplomatic equivalent of crossing against the light. (Of course, White House lawyers would argue that because the light was green in 1990, it's still okay to jaywalk.)

But far from breaking down the final barrier to an American attack, Powell's resignation may be the only way to stop

one. As it stands, Americans are ambivalent about another Gulf War. In theory, they support an invasion by a margin of 57 percent to 36 percent. When the possibility of American casualties is added to the equation, they oppose it, 51 to 40. This opposition would surely solidify should Powell put his career on the line.

Such an act would dramatize both the real risk of American casualties—all the more probable now that Saddam has intimated a willingness to force U.S. troops into urban guerrilla warfare—and draw attention to the likelihood that an invasion would only encourage the use of weapons of mass destruction. After all,

Saddam has little incentive to use chemical or biological weapons while he's in power. If we attack, what's there to lose?

Were the real motivation for action against Iraq the presence of biological or even nuclear weapons, our national—and international—interests would best be served by a true commitment to U.N. inspections. Only Iraq's refusal to permit inspections would bring immediate military force. Bush has robbed that threat of any meaning by making it clear that we're going to invade pretty much no matter what.

A telling weakness of the argument for war has been the way that it quickly crumbles into a very melodramatic name-calling. Faced with the arguments against military action, proponents like *The Weekly Standard's* Bill Kristol simply declare that Powell and other skeptics "hate the idea of a morally grounded foreign policy."

Saddam is indeed evil, but this is an awfully convenient time for the United States to start choosing its enemies solely based on that criterion (we've propped up leaders just as evil, and some worse, from Pinochet to the Taliban). But where do good and evil lie in the decisions that come after an invasion? Which way does the moral compass point when it comes to the numerous allies we would lose for the sake of subduing a single foe? How do the categories of

**Colin Powell told reporters he wasn't even thinking about resigning. But maybe he should.**

good and evil help us decide what budget cuts would be made to pay for a war? And is good or evil served by setting back further the already dismal chances for peace in Israel?

Morality is a characteristic of individuals, not administrations, and bravery does not always take the form of a willingness to go into battle. Powell's reasons for opposing an invasion may indeed be more pragmatic than moral: He realizes the importance of our alliances and the risks of unilateralism. But in the present invade-first-ask-questions-later climate, the easy thing to do would be to advocate aggression. Powell's reluctance to follow marching orders looks very brave indeed. ■



# NOT

# SO

# FAST



# BUSH WILL INVADE IRAQ... EVENTUALLY

BY DOUG IRELAND

**W**ith reams of disinformation spewing from Washington—much of it designed to keep the odious Saddam Hussein off-balance, some of it scripted to torpedo resumption of U.N. arms inspections—it is difficult to separate fact from fiction in the administration's plans for Iraq. But one thing is clear: Bush is bent on war.

Tom DeLay's hyper-jingoistic August 21 speech—"The question is not whether to go to war, for war has already been thrust upon us ... the only choice is between victory and defeat"—was, according to pundit Mark Shields, prepared in careful collaboration with Condoleezza Rice, the president's hawkish national security adviser. And Dick Cheney's August 26 speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars—mocking the notion of resumed inspections and all but declaring (without any supporting evidence) that Saddam has nukes—made it crystal clear to any doubters that Dubya and his civilian cronies in the military-industrial complex have made up their minds.

That the superhawks won the debate within the administration has been clear ever since early June, when the White House dumped its principal military anti-terrorism counselor, Deputy National Security Adviser Wayne Downing, over his opposition to a long and destructive air-and-ground campaign in Iraq. But history will undoubtedly record the defining moment as Bush's Iraq-driven June 1 speech at West Point, which has received insufficient attention. In it, Bush outlined the most radical change in military doctrine since the dawn of the Cold War, consigning deterrence and containment to the dustbin and affirming the U.S. readiness to take "pre-emptive action" (a euphemism for aggression). The result of a year-long reflection by the Bushies, the speech prefigured the Cheney and DeLay's first-strike drum-beating. (For a brilliant dissection of this speech, see "Pre-emption: A Nuclear Schiefen Plan?" on the indispensable Web site of Defense and the National Interest, a consortium of disillusioned military officials and analysts at [www.d-n-i.net](http://www.d-n-i.net).)

**W**ith Bush decided on a “pre-emptive” war, the only question is: When?

Despite musings in some quarters about a November Surprise, or an all-out military campaign next spring, there is every reason to believe that the war on Iraq will be timed for maximum effect on Bush’s re-election in 2004. The White House reasons that a full-scale invasion of Iraq—the only way to secure its professed goal of “regime change”—will reignite the nationalist fervor unleashed by the 9/11 attacks, guaranteeing the continued quiescence of the Democrats and sending the president’s approval ratings (now around 65 percent in most polls) back into the stratosphere.

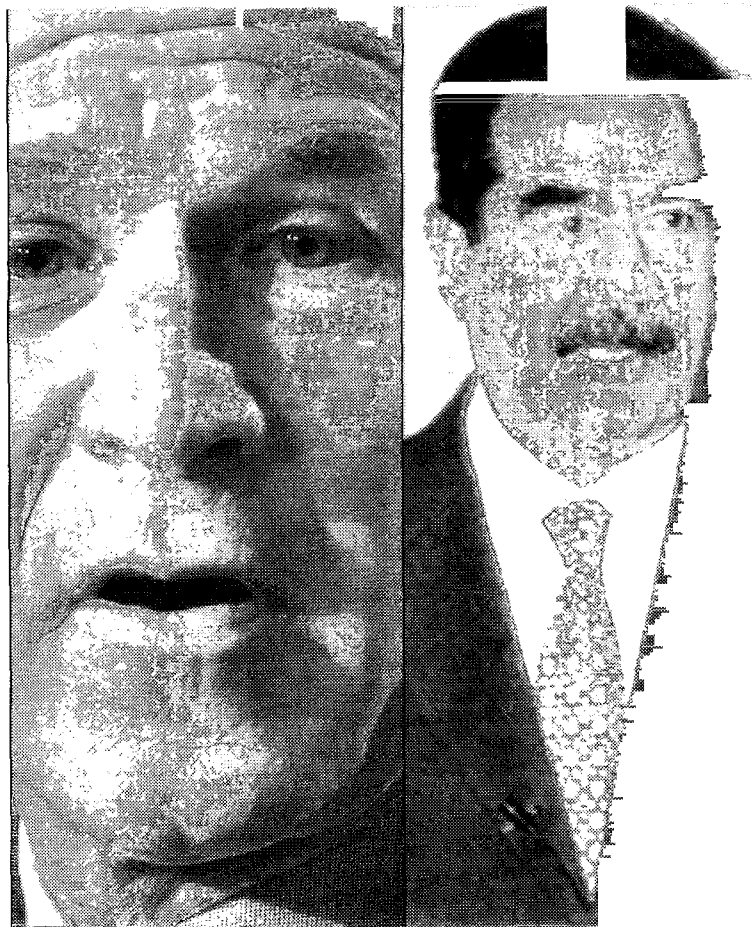
The tanking of the economy—too slow so far to offer any measurable improvement of the Democrats’ chances in November, but likely to have accelerated by 2004—and the nagging Harken and Halliburton scandals’ residual potential to tarnish the Bush-Cheney ticket together mean that Bush will need to keep in reserve the option of lighting the counterfire of war fever to ensure his victory. (That’s what Dubya meant when he proclaimed from Crawford, “I’m a patient man.”)

The economic consequences of the war—including soaring oil prices—at the time of a metastasizing budget deficit (the Democratic-controlled Senate Budget Committee is already projecting a deficit of \$400 billion-plus without the war) cannot be allowed to hit voters’ pocketbooks until Bush’s second term is assured. Nor can the stream of body bags inevitable in the kind of air-ground campaign envisioned be allowed to give pause too soon to voters used to the infinitesimal U.S. casualty rates of the Gulf and Afghanistan wars.

This is the most poll-driven administration in U.S. history—even more so than during Clinton’s Dick Morris period—and the Bushies’ readings of the numbers tell them the public is not yet ready for war. For example, the August 13 *Washington Post/ABC* poll showed that, when asked if war on Iraq meant “significant” U.S. casualties, support for it plummeted to 40 percent, while opposition rose to 51 percent. A CBS survey days later produced similar results. And the CNN poll taken near the end of August showed a one-month drop of almost nine points in support for the war.

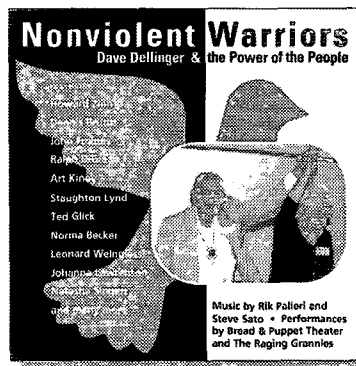
Numbers like these suggest a significant political opening that the Democrats are failing to exploit against Bush. The Democrats refuse to behave like the opposition party they’re supposed to be. By continuing to hew to the mantra “don’t criticize Bush’s war on terrorism,” the Democrats are not only ignoring a chance to attract increasingly uneasy voters and improve their chances for this November’s issue-less congressional elections, they are sidestepping an opportunity to lay the groundwork for a solid challenge to Bush’s leadership in the presidential

Poll numbers suggest a significant political opening that the Democrats are failing to exploit. Their silence on Iraq is worse than a crime—it’s a mistake.



Bush sees Saddam’s ouster as his ticket to re-election.

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**Arab leaders like Jordan's King Abdullah II and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah have been outspoken in their opposition to Washington's warmongering.**

elections just two years hence. Of course, they're also abandoning any claim to moral leadership (an irrelevant quibble with the cynicism that dominates domestic political calculus these days). When they're not bleating their support for all-out war on Iraq, as Dick Gephardt has done, the Democrats' silence on Iraq is, to borrow Talleyrand's famous dictum, worse than a crime—it's a mistake.

**F**urthermore, the Bush administration will wait because the United States is not ready for this war, either diplomatically or militarily. Those like James Baker who argue that U.N. approval must be sought for any war on Iraq are whistling in the wind—it would certainly be scuttled by a Security Council veto from China or Russia (unlikely to approve war on a country with which Vladimir Putin has just signed a huge long-term trade deal). Bush will thus be forced to cobble together a coalition outside U.N. auspices. But with whom?

The only solid anti-Saddam ally until now has been Tony Blair. But British support for the war is weakening under public pressure—a U.K. poll released August 28 shows support for the Bush-Cheney line on Iraq has fallen to just 30 percent, with 56 percent of Labour Party supporters opposed to the war. Numbers like these explain why British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw publicly plumped for a political solution based on resumed inspections of Iraq the day after Cheney's speech rejected them.

Among other NATO allies, Spain's Jose María Aznar and Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, Bush's arch-conservative pals—are going no further than generalized condemnations of Saddam, without committing themselves to war. France's Jacques Chirac is opposed to anything but a political solution. Germany's Gerhard Schröder has scored points campaigning as an anti-war candidate, forcing his formerly hawkish opponent Edmund Stoiber to advocate U.N. approval before an attack and favor a "European common attitude" toward the war—inevitably a negative one. The smaller European countries are all against military action.

Turkey, with its U.S. bases, would be a critical component of the anti-Saddam coalition. But the lame-duck administration of Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit has already proclaimed its opposition to the war; and the most likely product of this November's parliamentary elections—a coalition government of the Islamist party and ultra-right nationalists—would be even more unlikely to allow Turkish soil to be used to launch an attack on Iraq.

According to *Aviation Week and Space Technology* (noted for its Pentagon sources), planning for the war includes three projected bases in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. But Washington has assured Ankara there will be no independent Kurdish state once the war is over—so there's little incentive for the Kurds (already betrayed by the United States during the Gulf War) to see the autonomous zone they've won destroyed by Bush's bloodthirsty adventure. They're getting rich from the handsome rake-offs on nearly all trade with Iraq, for which the territory under their control is the principal route.

Even Egypt's Hosni Mubarak—America's lavishly paid client—has thundered that in the absence of an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, "not one Arab leader will be able to control the angry outburst of the masses" if the United States attacks Iraq. That leaves an unsavory gaggle of corrupt and despotic sheikdoms as our allies in the "war for democracy": the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. Yet the Kuwaitis, like the Saudis, are opposed to the war because they're worried Saddam's forces will blow up their highly vulnerable oil fields, as occurred in the Gulf War. And the huge new U.S. base just south of Doha in Qatar—designed to replace America's Saudi base in al-Kharg (which the Saudis won't let us use for the war) as headquarters for the U.S. air command—has not yet been completed. But Qatar's foreign minister has said his country will follow the Saudis: no use of its bases. (It's curious that this new base, unlike al-Kharg, is not being constructed with bunkers or other systematic protections against chemical and biological warfare—which would seem logical if U.S. claims about Saddam's weapons capacity were really true). This helps explain Bush's repulsive late-August boot-licking of the corrupt and repressive Saudi royal family, in a vain effort to win Saudi support for the war.

Given all this, war with Iraq is more than unlikely before 2004—meaning there's still time to convince the U.S. electorate that it's a foolhardy project, illegal under international law, that will only manufacture new generations of terrorists throughout the Islamic world. Such a war would vitiate our preachments on no pre-emptive war to countries with nukes like India and Pakistan and would leave the planet's only superpower further isolated in world opinion as an aggressor nation.

That makes the Democrats' decision to leave the education of the American people about the dangers in Bush's war plans to a handful of members of Bush's own party even more indefensible. This reprehensible caution will prove, in the end, to have been self-defeating. All together now: Four More Years! ■

# TURKEY

By Ian Urbina

These days the mantra of U.S. foreign policy-makers toward the Middle East is "regime change." Hamid Karzai is firmly installed in Afghanistan, the Palestinians have been given an ultimatum to replace Yasser Arafat, and now all eyes are on Saddam Hussein. But as the White House gears up to attack Iraq, a messy situation for a longtime ally could complicate U.S. plans. Turkey seems to



VINCENT A. PARKER / GETTY

**The most militarily viable road to Baghdad runs through Turkey, but Ankara is reluctant to endorse U.S. plans for Saddam Hussein.**

be conducting a regime change of its own, and it's not clear who will take the reins or what the new government's stance will be toward Washington.

To invade Iraq, the United States desperately needs Turkish help. The most militarily viable road to Baghdad runs through southeast Turkey. And the air cover provided during the Gulf War from Incirlik airbase in southwest Turkey—currently home to more than 50 U.S. fighter jets—would be even more essential in the type of campaign that Washington is now considering. Furthermore, the Pentagon wants to arm and train the Kurds in northern Iraq, as it did with Afghanistan's Northern Alliance. But that would require a green light from Ankara, which keeps the Kurdish population firmly under its thumb.

As the only predominantly Muslim member of NATO, Turkey is diplomatically important, representing the geographic and cultural gateway between the West and the Islamic world. Turkish willingness to cooperate with Western interests in the region is not in question. The Turks have played an active role in the war on terrorism, and, for the next six months, 1,400 Turkish troops will take over as the international force in Afghanistan.

But the United States has had trouble getting a reluctant Turkey to endorse its plans for Saddam Hussein. The Gulf War and its fallout cost the Turks \$50 billion in lost trade. The country's economy remains in its worst shape since 1945; the IMF's single largest debtor, Turkey is teetering on the edge of default.

Turkey also desperately wants to join the European Union—most of whose members oppose an invasion of Iraq. In its bid for membership, Turkey recently took the positive steps of ending peacetime capital punishment and loosening restrictions on Kurdish broadcasting. But Brussels will demand further economic reforms and stronger checks on the military's involvement in politics.

A U.S. invasion of Iraq would surely inflame Turkey's conflict with the Kurds. Since 1984, Turkey has been at war with the Kurds, both within and across its borders. There have been some 40,000 mostly Kurdish casualties and more than 3,000 Kurdish villages destroyed, displacing as many as 2 million civilians. Turkey fears the possibility of an autonomous Kurdish state being created in post-Saddam Iraq, which might embolden the 20 million Kurds of southern Turkey to push for more basic rights or eventually break away. Ankara especially doesn't like the idea of Kirkuk and its surrounding oil-rich area, which once produced more than 70 percent of Iraq oil exports, ending up as the Kurdish capital.

But Turkey's internal political crisis may be the most serious obstacle to U.S. aspirations. Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit is a lame duck, and as the 77-year-old's health has worsened, his coalition government has fallen apart.

Defections have taken Ecevit's party from being the largest component of the government to the smallest, forcing him to acquiesce to early elections in November.

Polls in Turkey currently have the Justice and Development Party—led by Istanbul's former mayor, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a pro-Islamist—winning by a landslide. In the past, Islamist parties have been outspokenly opposed to Turkey's facilitation of U.S. policy toward Iraq, including the no-fly zones policed by U.S. and British fighters from Incirlik.

Promises of debt assistance and arms disbursements in hand, Washington might throw its weight behind Ismail Cem, the strongly pro-Western ex-foreign minister, who has quickly assembled the New Turkey Party out of Ecevit defectors. But so far Cem has failed to form a viable coalition, an effort particularly frustrated by former World Bank Vice President Kemal Dervis, who left Ecevit's government but remains on the sidelines, withholding his endorsement.

The far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP), making the best of a chaotic situation, is now running second in the polls at around 11 percent. Aside from tapping into the frustration of skyrocketing unemployment, the MHP also has drawn strong backing from the Army by taking a firm stance against any expansion of Kurdish civil rights, claiming it will only fan the flames of separatism.

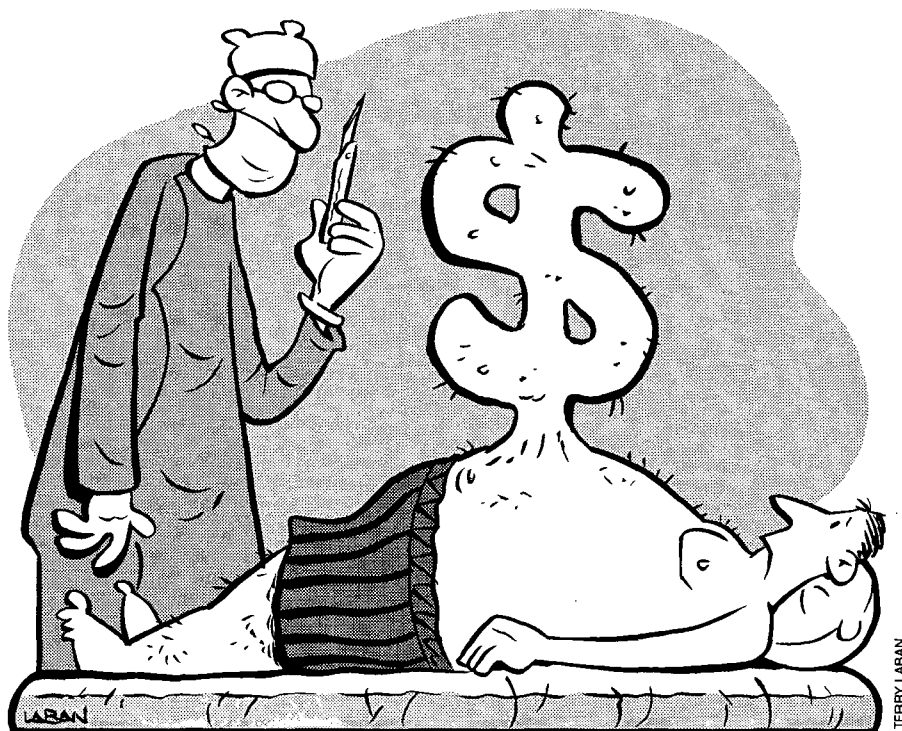
The prospect of democratic elections ushering in an Islamist government is deeply troubling to the highly influential armed forces, who fear that Erdogan would steer the nation away from its pro-Western course. That raises the danger of a military coup. The military has seized power three times in the last four decades, including a pivotal role in unseating the republic's first Islamist-led government in 1997.

Would the United States look the other way in the event of another coup? For Washington, calculated and guided regime change is always preferable to an unpredictable democratic vote. With so many financial and strategic interests at stake, it is likely that the United States will get involved in Turkey's political quagmire. The question is how. ■



# Drop Dead

*For* **health insurance companies,**  
*the* **problem isn't them,**  
*it's* **US**



**By Kip Sullivan**

**T**he business press is abuzz about a brand new “solution” to health care inflation. In case you’ve missed it, the next big thing in health policy is ... large deductibles.

Yes, large deductibles. According to the promoters of large-deductible health insurance policies, the cause of high health care costs is “excessive demand” for medical care caused by “overinsurance”—that is, insurance with small deductibles. In the blinkered worldview of these advocates, double-digit inflation in health insurance premiums can be blamed entirely on pampered patients.

The number of large-deductible policies sold is still very small—no more than a few hundred thousand. But the political and economic support for pushing or forcing Americans to buy such policies is growing rapidly among the nation’s economic elite and within the upper echelons of the Republican Party. The American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association, the National Pharmaceutical Council, several of the nation’s Blue Cross companies, numerous Fortune 500 companies and George W. Bush have all expressed their support for large-deductible policies.

These newly fashionable policies go by several names, the most common of which is “defined contribution plan.” Here is how the May 27 issue of *Fortune* magazine explained the “trend

toward” defined contribution health plans: “Because consumers ... have gotten used to paying relatively small, set deductibles and co-payments for virtually unlimited health coverage, most people have lost track of how much medical care, tests and drugs actually cost. That means we tend to use health insurance like a spoiled teenager with daddy’s credit cards.”

Spoiled sick people, you see, are the real cause of America’s high health care costs. If daddy would rip a big hole in our insurance coverage, we’d shape up.

**D**efined-contribution plans come with a variety of bells and whistles, but they all share two features. First, the employer gives employees a set amount of money per year—a defined contribution—typically in the range of \$1,500 for families, less for employees with no dependents. Second, the insurance policy has a large deductible, typically in the range of \$3,000 to \$5,000 for families, less for employees without dependents. Employees use their defined contribution—their \$1,500—to pay for the first \$1,500 of medical bills. If they incur medical bills in excess of \$1,500, they pay out of pocket until they’ve hit their \$3,000, \$4,000 or \$5,000 deductible.

The employers’ incentive to push their employees into defined-contribution plans is that the premiums are substantially lower, perhaps \$2,000 to \$2,500 less for a year’s worth of family coverage, than for policies with the more typical \$250 to \$500 deductible. If employers save, say, \$2,000 on reduced pre-

miums and give their employees \$1,500 of that in the form of a "defined contribution," they pocket \$500. The incentive for employees is that the burden of their share of the premiums is lightened (the typical employee now pays 20 to 30 percent of the total premium) and, under some defined-contribution plans, employees get to keep whatever portion of the defined contribution—the \$1,500—they don't spend on medical bills.

The growth in interest in these plans has been directly proportional to the decline of the last great fad in health policy: managed care, in which "utilization reviews" second-guess doctors who are also given financial incentives to deny services to patients. The patient backlash against managed care was of some concern to the business community. But it wasn't until managed care proved incapable of containing health care inflation that employers began to withdraw their support for managed-care theology. The annual growth rate in health insurance premiums began to soar in 1997, and hit double digits in 2000. By the turn of the millennium, managed care's reputation in the business community was kaput.

The insurance industry responded quickly. By 2000, half a dozen defined-contribution plan companies, including Definity Health, Lumenos and Vivius, were in business. By March 2001 the fledgling plans had created their own trade group, the Consumer Driven Health Care Association. That April, Blue Cross of California introduced a defined-contribution plan, the first to be sponsored by a major insurer. Humana, Cigna, United Health Group and Wellpoint Health Networks are now all preparing to market defined-contribution plans. Since January, managed-care giant Aetna, now the nation's second largest health insurance company, has offered its defined-contribution plan to its own employees. (The company will not reveal, however, the number of its employees who choose to enroll.)

Because defined-contribution plans are so new, it is unclear how successful they will be. It is clear, however, that interest is widespread among employers, especially large employers. According to a 2001 survey conducted by William M. Mercer Inc., 29 percent of employers with more than 20,000 employees said they were likely to offer defined-contribution plans to their employees within two years. The November 2001 decision by the Pacific Business Group on Health, a coalition of 47 large West Coast employers, to offer a defined-contribution plan to its employees is perhaps the most impressive evidence of an emerging trend. "We believe this selection ... will change the course of how health care is delivered, not just in California but in the country," said Peter Lee, chief executive of the group.

**T**he wild card in the defined contribution experiment is consumer reaction. The small number of large-deductible policies sold in the past gives some indication that consumers do not like such policies. But whereas traditional deductibles apply to the first

dollar of medical expenditures, defined-contribution plan deductibles don't kick in until the insured person has spent all of the employer's contribution. In any given year, a sizable majority of the nonelderly population will spend less than \$1,500 to \$2,000. These are, by definition, the healthiest people. These healthy people would, in effect, have deductibles equal to zero. It is entirely possible that defined-contribution plans, with their low premiums and—in some cases, cash-back incentives—will attract a substantial number of healthy Americans, just as HMOs attract disproportionately healthy people.

These plans may hold another attraction for healthy Americans, and perhaps even for sicker Americans. Defined-contribution companies, well aware of America's antipathy to managed care, are advertising their large-deductible policies as an escape from managed care. Definity Health, for example, includes in its promotional material a picture of the front cover of the November 8, 1999, edition of *Newsweek* that depicts a furious woman in a hospital gown, her face turned to the heavens and her fists clenched, under the words, "HMO Hell." The Vivius Web site promises, "You'll have complete control over health care decisions for you and your family." The phrases "consumer-driven" and "empowering consumers" appear repeatedly in the defined-contribution advertisements.

It appears, however, that most insurers selling defined-contribution plans have not sworn off managed care. According to an article in *Health Affairs*, Definity Health relies not only on doctor networks, but on a company called Advance PCS to run its drug formulary (a mechanism for forcing doctors to order only drugs approved of by Advance PCS), and on United Behavioral Health (UBH) to manage its mental health and substance-abuse services. (UBH is a subsidiary of United Health Group, the nation's largest health insurance company.)

Under Vivius' plan, according to *HR Today*, a magazine for human resources executives, "physicians and hospitals will provide medical services to system members for a fixed monthly fee. Employees do not have to submit claim forms. ... [They] access a Vivius Web site listing the names and the monthly, capitated fees charged by participating physicians, hospitals and other providers."

In other words, Vivius has adopted two of the most common cost-containment tools of HMOs: limiting patient choice of doctor, and paying doctors a set fee per patient per year ("capitation"). Vivius doctors have the usual HMO incentive to deny services.

If lower premiums and the anti-managed care hype induce a substantial number of healthy people to enroll in defined-contribution plans, traditional insurers could be sucked into a "death spiral." Death spirals occur when an insurance company begins to lose its healthiest enrollees to another insurance company and must raise its premiums to be able to pay for the care of the sicker people who



According to health insurers, we're all spoiled children.



remain. The higher premiums cause the healthiest of the remaining enrollees to exit, which leaves the insurer with an even sicker patient base. The insurer has to raise its premiums again, and around the vicious cycle goes.

Traditional insurers faced with this threat will have two options: cut costs by denying even more services to patients than they do already, or morph into a defined-contribution plan. Because managed care insurers, stung by the HMO backlash, are already beginning to use utilization review and financial incentives less aggressively, the latter option is more likely. If defined-contribution plans can attract a critical mass of customers, and if that critical mass is disproportionately healthy, the rest of the insurance industry will be forced to incorporate large-deductible plans.

**R**egardless of whether they attract primarily healthy people, defined-contribution schemes will damage quality of care. Even generally healthy people encounter unexpected bouts of illness that require expensive medical attention. People insured by defined-contribution plans who need medical care will be forced to self-ration to avoid incurring medical bills that exceed their employer's contribution. This behavior is most likely to occur among defined-contribution plan enrollees with low incomes. This is not speculation; dozens of studies have demonstrated that the threat of even modest out-of-pocket costs causes low-income people to forgo necessary medical care, including medical attention for conditions as serious as angina in adults and appendicitis in children.

Promoters of defined-contribution plans have no answer to this research. They rely, rather, on the old HMO canard that much medical care sold today is unnecessary. Whereas HMO advocates claimed overuse of the health care system was caused by greedy doctors who could be brought under control with financial incentives and utilization review, defined-contribution proponents argue that overuse is rampant because patients are "overinsured," a problem which can be reined in by exposing patients to larger deductibles and more out-of-pocket costs. *Fortune's* insulting comparison of patients to spoiled teen-agers is typical of this lazy argument.

The "overuse" argument is not a complete lie—many doctors dispense antibiotics inappropriately, for example—but it is a grossly misleading half-truth. The other half of the truth is that medical care is also *underused*, even among insured people. Two-thirds of all Americans with mental disorders don't seek treatment. Half of all insured Americans suffering from high blood pressure are not getting treated. Half of insured patients who, according to a stress test, should have an angiogram don't get one. One-fourth of insured patients whose angiograms indicate they should have heart surgery don't get it. A third of the nation's diabetics don't know they have diabetes. One-third of Americans don't see a dentist at least once a year. One-eighth of the insured nonelderly do not fill a prescription because of cost. These and other data suggest underuse is at least as extensive as overuse, if not more so. Defined-contribution plans, with their incentives to self-ration health care, will seriously aggravate the underuse problem.

**O**f course, the great irony of this emerging fad in health policy is that it ignores the real cause of health care inflation. The most important cause of America's incredibly costly health

care system is the enormous waste generated not by "over-insured" patients, but by the supply side of the system. This supply-side waste includes:

- Expenditures by the insurance industry for administrative functions that have nothing to do with taking care of patients, such as marketing, harassing doctors and lobbying.
- The administrative costs doctors and hospitals incur to argue with HMO utilization reviewers.
- The redundant MRIs and other equipment purchased by hospitals "competing" with one another to see who can have the most expensive machinery on the premises.
- High fees charged by doctors, especially specialists.
- Outrageous prices charged by drug manufacturers.
- Fraud committed against insurance companies and public health programs by doctors and other health care providers, and con artists masquerading as providers.

None of this supply-side waste will be remotely affected by patients thinking twice about seeing a doctor. The only effective solution to health care inflation is a sane national health insurance system—one that relies on price controls, budgets for hospitals and a single payer to control costs. ■

**Kip Sullivan** lives in Minneapolis and writes frequently about health policy.

## Amplifying Women's Voices



### The Palestinian/Israeli Conflict

The crisis in Israel and Palestine is often framed as a fight between two aging men- Sharon vs. Arafat- but women have been some of the most vocal and creative voices for peace and justice. The Center for Public Intellectuals/The Public Square will host a public forum amplifying a few of those voices.

Please join us on September 17<sup>th</sup> 7:00 PM at the  
Hothouse, 31 East Balbo, Chicago, Illinois  
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A \$5.00 Donation is requested. Speakers will include:

**Ellisa Becker**- the national coordinator of The Jewish Alliance for Peace and Justice who has just returned from Israel.

**Nadia Hijab**- a New York Based human rights activist and former editor of the *The Middle East Magazine* and commentator on the BBC.

**Marda Dunsky**- an assistant professor at the Medill School of Journalism who has worked as an Arab affairs reporter for the *Jerusalem Post*.

The Public Square (formerly the Center for Public Intellectuals) is a non-profit organization that fosters intellectual curiosity, builds bridges between intellectuals and the general public, and facilitates collaborative partnerships in order to work towards social change.

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# Toledo In Trouble

By **Steve Ellner**  
**Lima, Peru**

**T**he bigger they are, the harder they fall. That proverb may explain why President Alejandro Toledo's popularity has nose-dived since his election in June 2001. With Toledo at its head, a popular movement had brought down the authoritarian government of Alberto Fujimori the previous November, creating high expectations for his administration. Once in office, however, Toledo pursued policies that endeared him to Washington but alienated the people.

A former shoeshine boy raised in abject poverty, Toledo is the nation's first president of Indian extraction, the ethnicity of 80 percent of the population. During the campaign, Toledo played up his Indian background, constantly reminding voters that he was born in the Andean mountains, home to the nation's Indian communities. Likening himself to the Inca Emperor Pachacutec, he called his electoral triumph the "reconquest" and held his inauguration at Machu Picchu.

Toledo's election-time populism did not end there. While on the stump, he glibly promised to create 1 million jobs and embraced policies that were the antithesis of neoliberalism—most notably pledging not to privatize state companies. Once in office, however, Toledo almost immediately implemented a neoliberal agenda. His administration announced a plan to sharply lower taxes on imports to pave the way for economic integration with the United States, a move away from exclusive tariff arrangements with neighboring Latin American countries.

His unfulfilled promises were the product of deceit, not a lack of realism, as he claims. An economist by trade, Toledo actually suggested during the latter years of the Fujimori regime that the government did not go far enough in pushing neoliberal reforms. Despite his campaign rhetoric, Toledo chose a Washington-based corporate lawyer to draft his economic plank and drew in others closely linked to U.S. financial circles to assure investors of his good intentions. These technocrats occupied top cabinet positions in charge of economic policy in the Toledo administration.

Of all of the broken pledges, Toledo's privatization schemes enraged Peruvians the most. But the president's loss of credibility—his approval rating has plummeted to 16 percent—has coincided with a resurgence of popular groups. The same movement that brought Toledo to power, far more than any political party, now represents the biggest political challenge to his government.

**S**pirited protests in Lima's central plazas have become daily occurrences. One recent day, public employees picketed in front of the presidential palace, holding pictures of rats to symbolize corruption and chanting slogans to protest graft and Toledo's



During June's general strike in Arequipa, Peruvians took to the streets to protest the sell-off of two electric companies. The sign on the right reads: "Toledo traitor, die."

blatant nepotism. The same day, workers gathered at the national Congress to protest layoffs at the Spanish-owned telephone company. Several hours later, a march of university workers arrived demanding incorporation of their rights in the new constitution.

But privatization is the No. 1 issue in the nation's political debate. The general strike that paralyzed Arequipa, Peru's second-largest city, in June showed how deep anti-privatization sentiment runs. A regional alliance organized the protests and formed neighborhood committees in opposition to the sale of two nearby electricity companies to Tractebel, a Belgian conglomerate. Arequipa Mayor Juan Manuel Guillén, who had organized protests along with Toledo to topple Fujimori, staged a hunger strike in opposition to the sales. He was joined by seven other mayors in the vicinity, who demanded that the matter be decided by referendum. Toledo reacted by sending in 1,700 soldiers and declaring a state of siege. The troops dislodged some 150 protesters from the city's central plaza, but they regrouped behind nearby barricades, shouting "Arequipa is not for sale."

After three days, Toledo backed down and announced the suspension of his privatization plans. The Peruvian media attributed his capitulation to the two people killed, scores more wounded, and \$100 million in property damage caused by the protests. But another factor was equally compelling. The Arequipa struggle was spreading to nearby cities in southern Peru and was beginning to resonate in the capital, where residents were planning street actions against the proposed privatization of drinking water. The anti-privatization zeal also manifested itself in massive vandalism committed in several cities against public telephones, which Fujimori had sold off nearly a decade ago. (In addition, coca-growing peasants were preparing to

MIGUEL ZEGARRA / REUTERS



march on Lima to protest the U.S.-promoted fumigation of their fields.)

Popular attitudes against privatization have been shaped by experience. A congressional report published in July traced \$1.5 billion derived from privatization under Fujimori that was spent on arms and colossal kickbacks deposited abroad. Whereas Fujimori—now living in exile in Japan—defended his privatization of more than 200 companies on grounds that it eliminated inefficient operations and brought in new technology, Toledo's main rationale is to raise badly needed revenue. Toledo hoped to raise \$2.5 billion from his privatization program in two years, partly to pay interest on the nation's staggering \$30 billion foreign debt.

**I**n the aftermath of the Arequipa fiasco, and with his popularity at rock bottom, Toledo changed course. In mid-July, Toledo replaced two key technocrats in his cabinet as well as several others. "After Arequipa, Toledo had to reaffirm his popular credentials," says Doris Sánchez of the president's Peru Possible Party. Sánchez adds that any further privatization must avoid the mistakes of Arequipa. For instance, not only were local representatives not included in the privatization process, but "the bidding ended up as a farce since all but one bidder dropped out."

The new cabinet immediately announced the suspension of the privatization of other state-owned firms until after the state and municipal elections in November. This concession, however, represents a fragile victory for the popular forces. The Toledo government's argument that the privatization issue should be kept out of the upcoming campaign suggests the process was simply postponed, not scrapped. In late July, Alan García, the opposition leader and former president, said the cabinet changes amounted to nothing more than a "change of names."

Nevertheless, the Arequipa struggle gave a shot of adrenaline to social movements on the left. "Now that the regional fronts have shown their might in Arequipa and elsewhere," says Carlos Esteves, a leading leftist, "parties on the left need to endorse as candidates for the November elections the natural leaders who came out of these struggles."

But for the time being, these regional leaders seem more concerned with organizing protests than running for office. Mayor Guillén announced in late August that should the decision to suspend privatization be reversed, "Arequipa will return to the streets."

**T**oledo has further disillusioned Peruvians with his failure to break completely with the past. Over the last year, the Commission of Truth and Reconciliation has been probing human rights violations in the two-decade-long war against the Shining Path guerrillas. But those held responsible for atrocities will not be brought to trial until after its report is issued in mid-2003. Human rights organizations affirm that innocent Peruvians,



Alejandro Toledo greets supporters during a visit by George W. Bush.

not the guerrillas, bore the brunt of state repression. In recent months, national TV has transmitted the testimony of victims who described kangaroo trials with masked judges, massacres, torture and rape.

Toledo's ambivalent position on the issue was demonstrated clearly in May, when his government refused to carry out a court order to arrest 15 elite army commandos charged with killing three Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement guerrillas in cold blood. Just minutes before the massacre, the commandos had liberated 71 hostages, who had been held by the rebels at the Japanese Embassy for several months starting in late 1996. Government spokesmen have called the soldiers "national heroes," and the Ministry of Defense staunchly backs them, suggesting the continued influence of Fujimori loyalists within the armed forces. On July 27, Ronald Gamarra, the special prosecutor for human rights, warned the Toledo administration that it was "resisting authority" and in the process "committing a criminal act." But a month later, the Supreme Court transferred the case to military court.

Fujimori's extensive corruption network in both the public and private sectors also has remained largely untouchable. In July, the congressional Commission on Economic and Financial Crimes published a report documenting \$9 billion in shady privatization transactions, which the Fujimori-controlled Congress refused to investigate. "Now it is time for Toledo to demonstrate that he is willing to move not just against his high-profile adversaries accused of wrongdoing," says Esteves, who worked with the commission, "but entrenched economic interests as well."

Corrupt Fujimori associates still dot the state bureaucracy at all levels. "I could not just weed out these people because I had no hard proof against them," says Sánchez, the former minister of women's affairs. "So I just relieved them of important duties." But pressure for a purge comes from public employees who lost their jobs as a consequence of the austerity measures implemented by Fujimori and Toledo. On July 28, the date of Toledo's first anniversary in office, public employees demonstrated in Lima and elsewhere, demanding their jobs back and removal of the Fujimori loyalists.

Toledo's lifestyle has further undermined his support. Controversial issues include his extravagance, alleged drug use and nepotism—his Belgium-born wife recently gave up a \$10,000-a-month consulting job after public outcry. Most scandalous may be his refusal to acknowledge 14-year old Zaraf Toledo Orozco as his daughter. Even Toledo's followers have a hard time understanding why the President refused to obey a court order issued in late June to take a DNA test.

Government supporters suggest that deep-rooted racism is behind the anti-Toledo campaign. That explanation, however, can be turned on its head. Resentment against Toledo is strikingly evident among the poor, particularly those who closely identify with their Indian heritage and viewed Toledo as one of their own. Arriving from the airport in Cuzco, the Inca capital, visitors are greeted with graffiti reading, "TOLEDO TRAITOR." Such a fiery slogan points to a key lesson: In this era of acute social and economic tensions, demagoguery comes home to haunt politicians, especially when, like Toledo, they claim to be one of the people. ■

# Fujimori's Legacy

By Gregory N. Heires

**P**eru is one of the most striking examples in Latin America of people saying "*Basta!*" ("Enough!") as they repudiate privatization and other free-market policies.

A recent congressional report on economic crimes under the regime of Alberto Fujimori substantiates the skepticism of privatization opponents, exposing the political cronyism and corruption behind the process. "In the case of Peru, a mafia took control of the state apparatus," says Javier Diez Canseco, the congressman who headed the investigation. "Privatization was a marriage of neoliberal ideas with concrete corrupt interests."

Peru continues to be mired in economic funk after more than a decade of free-market economic policies that were supposed to lift the living standards of the poor majority. "Privatization was supposedly done to spur development of the country," says Alvaro Cole, head of the public employees union known as CITE. "But that's not what happened, because the proceeds from the sales were not used for the long-term benefit of the country."

Of the 27 million people in Peru, more than half live in poverty, with a quarter eking out an existence on \$1 a day. As foreign debt payments eat up a quarter of the country's budget, millions lack running water and electricity. Only about 10 percent of workers occupy positions on company or government payrolls with protections and benefits, while millions of others work off the books. More than 50 percent of workers are unemployed or underemployed.

"We privatized, and we do not have less poverty, less unemployment," says Juan Manuel Guillén, the mayor of Arequipa and a leader of the fight against the privatization of the utility companies that forced the government of President Alejandro Toledo to put its policy of selling off state assets on hold. "We have more poverty and unemployment. We are not debating theoretically here. We are looking at reality."

**D**uring his 10 years in office, Fujimori violated human rights, destroyed the labor movement, undermined the political system and created a nexus of business, military and government leaders who stole millions. The sell-off of more than 200 state companies allowed the government to fund programs and create an artificial boom without addressing the country's underlying problems of a weak revenue base, an inequitable tax structure and lack of full-time jobs.

All told, the privatization sales during the Fujimori years amounted to \$9 billion. The state dedicated \$1.5 million of that to payments of the foreign debt. About \$1 billion of the proceeds were used for purchases of armaments of dubious or low quality. Most of the rest was spent on government programs.

According to the congressional investigation, Victor Joy Way, a former congressman and Fujimori loyalist, was the principal intermedi-

ary in the arms purchases. The commission also charged Joy Way, who is of Chinese descent, with profiting illegally from a deal to import medication and medical instruments from China. Dozens of other military and high-ranking government officials were charged with illicit arms dealing in the ensuing months after Fujimori's resignation in November 2000.

Fujimori's flight to Japan and his resignation via fax from there followed the release of video tapes that showed his spy chief Vladimiro Montesinos bribing politicians to support Fujimori's re-election effort, which the congressional commission charges was partly funded by proceeds from privatization. (In July, Montesinos was sentenced to nine years in jail for embezzling public funds, and he faces dozens of other charges, ranging from money-laundering to directing a death squad.)

As the commission report shows, privatization destroyed unions and caused the loss of 120,000 public sector jobs. In some instances—most notably telephone service—improvements occurred, but prices skyrocketed. The Fujimori government sold off state companies at artificially low prices, causing the state to lose millions of dollars in proceeds while permitting purchasers to make huge profits. Buyers reaped big tax breaks and failed to live up to commitments to invest. And the state agreed to assume \$765 million of the debt of the privatized companies. "It didn't matter if a state company was well-run and profitable," says Oscar Ugarteche, who headed the 20-member team that wrote the report. "The Fujimori government wrote a new constitution that said the state shouldn't own public firms, and they were committed to carrying that out."

Diez Canseco charges that Fujimori profited politically from the sales since the government used a big portion of the proceeds to fund government programs. That helped create a "fictitious boom" in the country, which also benefited from an influx of foreign capital from international banks and lending institutions during the early years of the Fujimori government. But from a policy standpoint, the reliance on privatization to pay for government programs is misguided because it relies upon "one-shot" infusions of funds that should ordinarily be obtained from taxes. In recent years, foreign investment in Peru has dropped as most of the state firms have been gobbled up.

The embattled administration of Alejandro Toledo faces a daunting economic challenge. "The cost of privatization has been very high," Diez Canseco says. "You now have foreign control of the country's national assets and the decision-making centers have been transferred outside the country. Today, the principal economic sectors are in foreign hands. As a result, the possibility of having a national plan for economic development is extraordinarily difficult."

*Gregory N. Heires is senior associate editor of Public Employee Press, the official publication of District Council 37 in New York. He visited Lima, where he worked during the '80s, in July.*

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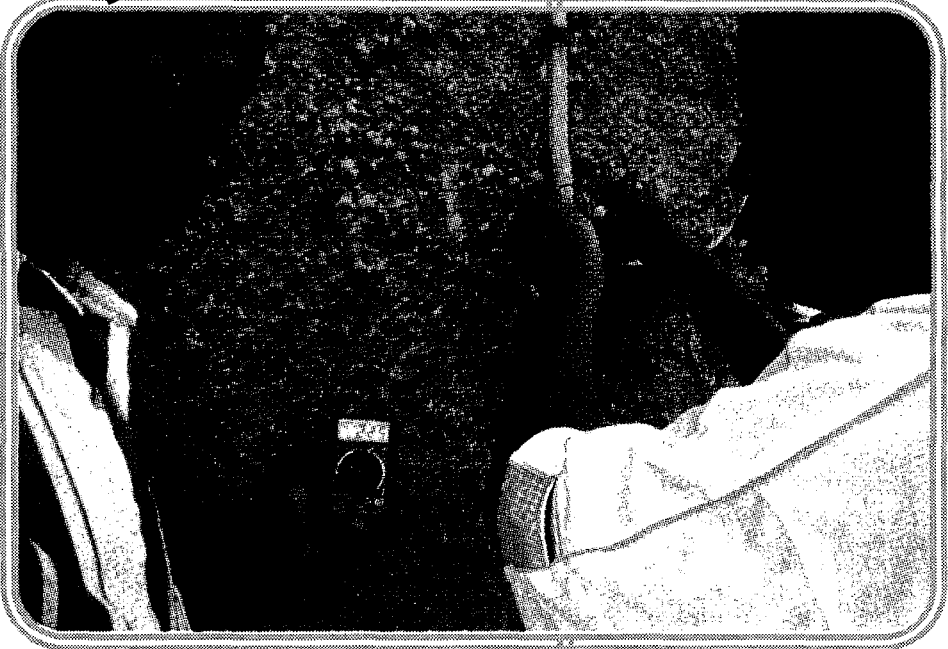
'Privatization was  
a marriage of  
neoliberal ideas  
with concrete  
corrupt interests.'

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# Lighting Up Soweto

**Guerrilla technicians challenge the privatization of South Africa's public resources**



As soon as Eskom cuts off the electricity, SECC volunteers switch it back on.

By Chris Smith

SOWETO, SOUTH AFRICA

To stand on Elizabeth Ndlovu's front porch, on a small hill in Soweto, is to see the township in its immensity: miles upon miles of boxy concrete houses, stubby lawns, a mess of winding streets laid out at random under the wide African sky. In the middle of it all stand the twin towers of a coal burning plant, soot-stained, now derelict. They can be seen from just about anywhere in the township, a reminder of the bad old days and of the white regime that placed them in Soweto's center to supply its gold mines and wealthy suburbs with cheap electricity.

For Ndlovu, the bad days never really ended. In 1997, amid a collapsing economy, she lost her job at a handbag store in downtown Johannesburg's decaying business district. Her husband, a laborer, had been laid off the year before. The debt began to pile up.

Worse, Ndlovu's electricity bill had gone up fourfold, a result of restructuring at Eskom, the state-owned electricity company. She paid as much of her bill as she could each month, but by the end of 1999 Eskom had cut her off and, in a scorched-earth operation designed to deter illegal reconnections, ripped the metering box and electric cables from her wall. For the next two years, she made do with a smoky, dangerous paraffin stove while trying to pay down the debt. "I was in the darkness for so long," says the sturdy 43-year-old matron.

Then, last October, a neighbor told Ndlovu about the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC). A phone call later, SECC member Phillip Matseoane turned up at her cinderblock house, carrying his toolbox and some heavy-duty cable. Matseoane

went to work at once, connecting his cable directly to the power lines in the ground. Within a few hours, Ndlovu was back on the grid. Matseoane only charged her for the cable. He says, "It gives me a lot of pleasure to see them say, 'Oh, I've got a piece of my life back.'"

A loose collective of guerrilla technicians, union workers and veterans of the anti-apartheid struggle, the SECC's all-volunteer force has been crisscrossing Soweto's neighborhoods for almost two years, reconnecting, by its count, 150,000 homes since the beginning of 2001—roughly the same number Eskom has cut off. "As soon as Eskom switches off, we switch on," says Bongani Lubisi, one of the group's chief technicians. So far, its game of cat-and-mouse, dubbed Operation Khanyisa (township Zulu for "to light"), has been successful. Earlier this year, Eskom announced a temporary suspension of cut-offs in the township of 1.5 million.

In the process, the group has given voice to a growing sentiment among ordinary South Africans that the governing African National Congress (ANC) has betrayed its progressive roots, and that many of its policies—the World Bank-supported privatization of state-run electricity and water distribution, in particular—have increased their suffering while enriching elites and international corporations.

The handover of these inefficient, apartheid-era state utilities was supposed to bring electricity and water to millions of new users efficiently and cheaply. Instead, as an emphasis on

"full cost recovery" replaced the flat rates South Africans were used to, prices skyrocketed—up to 400 percent, in some cases. In the Johannesburg area, Suez, a French consortium, holds the biggest private water contract in the world, which has led to higher rates and thousands of cutoffs. And at Eskom, which is preparing for at least a partial sell-off, officials say the electricity disconnections are meant to demonstrate a commitment to the bottom line.

Critics, however, say that by ignoring the well-documented benefits that universal electricity and water confer—such as greater health and increased economic activity—privatization's promise has been wasted. "They don't calculate these benefits, they just look at costs," says Patrick Bond, a professor at Johannesburg's University of Witwatersrand and co-director of its Municipal Services Project. "The whole concept of public good evaporates [with] privatization."

As a result, stories like Ndlovu's are increasingly common. Cape Town's privately run water company has cut off some 100,000 township homes, sparking riots and birthing radical groups of clandestine plumbers. (The SECC, though the most vocal opponent of the ANC's privatization policies, is by no means the only one.) New water policies in the mostly rural KwaZulu Natal province forced poor villagers to get their water from polluted rivers, setting off a cholera outbreak that killed almost 300 people and infected more than 120,000. And in the townships surrounding Nelspruit, in the steamy, lush lowlands near the Mozambique border, families hoard water in bathtubs and buckets, in preparation for the water cutoffs that arrive every few days.

Eight years after apartheid's end, the "struggle mentality," as activists call it, has returned. The difference now is the enemy: the ANC.

On a hot, dry summer morning in Diepkloof—a sprawling Soweto neighborhood of modest, densely packed homes and cracked asphalt—about 150 people gather by a shuttered storefront for an SECC meeting, young and old alike sheltering under umbrellas from the sun. The rally starts with singing, clapping and *toyi toying*, a Zulu protest dance that formed an integral part of any anti-apartheid rally.

Lubisi, the chief technician, warms up the crowd, speaking Zulu with flashes of English for emphasis. "They say you must pay for what is a basic human right," he yells. "We say no, never! Viva SECC!"

"Viva!" echoes the crowd.

Formed in May 2000, the SECC wears its left-wing politics proudly. Members call each other "comrade"; many, harking back to the gloriously remembered past of the black liberation movements, still call themselves Communists.

A group of *tsotsis* (township speak for "thugs") drinks beer and glowers at the rally from the other side of the narrow road. I'm standing near the back of the crowd, a conspicuous and presumably wealthy outsider, and I'm pulled toward the front for safety. Crime has risen with the unemployment rate, which now hovers, officially, at 30 percent. Unofficially, it is far higher.

During the question-and-answer period near the end of the rally, two local men—one wearing a threadbare Nelson Mandela T-shirt—begin yelling, accusing the SECC of betraying the ANC. The crowd soon shouts them down and, outnumbered, the men depart. Five minutes later, however, a convoy of police trucks turns the corner and comes to a rolling halt next to the rally, disgorging a dozen policemen. As the rest provide cover, a few leveling their shotguns at the jeering, angry crowd, two or three of the cops wade in and drag out a smirking teenager. The police are still seen as an occupying army here.

With its core constituency in the townships surrounding Johannesburg—among the most sophisticated and politically active in the country—the SECC has a powerful base. And its message is resonating, as South Africans, angry that hoped-for economic benefits haven't followed the political freedoms they gained in 1994, begin to question their leaders' policies. Like many black South Africans, Elizabeth Ndlovu speaks of "before" and "after" 1994's historic elections. "Before voting, we were paying 50 rand [roughly \$10 in 1994] for a month of electricity," she says. "But after the vote, sometimes a monthly bill is 400 rand [roughly \$40 in 2001]."

In a country where 50 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, that is a lot of money. "Government says, 'Be patient, change is difficult. Change doesn't come overnight,'" adds Virginia Setshedi, deputy chairwoman of the SECC and a law student at University of Witwatersrand. "But for them it did—now they are driving big cars and living in the suburbs. For us, everything is deteriorating."

Anger is fed by the conviction that electricity is a basic human right. A Constitutional Court ruling in 2000 suggested that a "lifeline" amount of electricity and water must be provided for free. Later that year, campaigning ANC officials promised free water and electricity to voters. However, free services—where they have been implemented—have amounted to just 10 percent of the average family's monthly electricity needs. Matseoane says: "Apartheid is done. This is supposed to be payback time. Instead, we got privatization."

Comparisons between the ANC and the apartheid government are "inevitable," says Percy Hintzen of the University of California. For President Thabo Mbeki's government, caught between its storied past and the dictates of international money markets—and faced with the AIDS epidemic, an appalling crime rate, sky-high unemployment and a crushing backlog of those in need of housing—the backlash was probably just a matter of time. "The ANC's legitimacy was based on these impossibly high expectations, which it can never deliver on," Hintzen explains. "The ANC said, 'When we come in, everything will change,' but it didn't. They are in a trap."

Government supporters note that the ANC has connected more than 2.5 million homes to the electricity grid since 1994 (less than 40 percent of African homes had electricity at liberation), with similar strides in other sectors. The ANC has gone



PHOTOS: CHRIS SMITH



on the offensive, questioning the SECC's motives and patriotism. "The so-called Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, through its Operation Khanyisa, has become part of [a] criminal culture," ANC Public Enterprises Minister Jeff Radebe said at a November news conference. "The representatives of this committee have proven that they will do anything, including telling lies to the community, in order to realize its political ends. Such people cannot be regarded as the genuine representatives of our people."

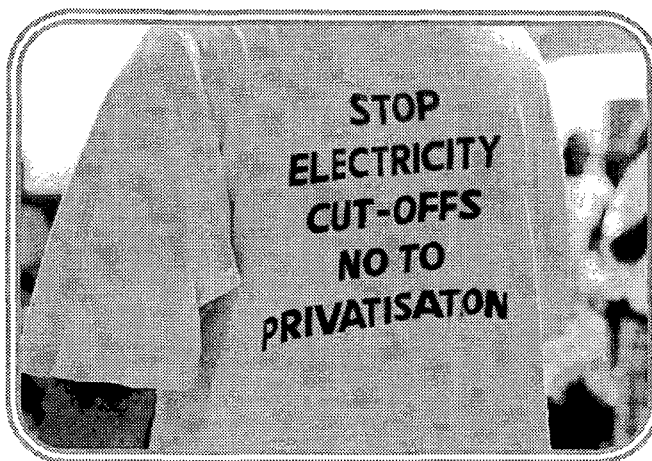
Confrontations between the SECC and the government have escalated recently. In Soweto, local ANC councilors have barred the SECC from holding meetings in most town halls (hence the street-corner rally I attended). And during the past year, SECC leaders and supporters have been arrested at protests outside Eskom offices and the homes of various ANC officials. A protest this spring outside the home of Johannesburg's deputy mayor ended when his bodyguard opened fire on a rock-throwing crowd.

**S**oweto residents complain of inconsistent and outrageous billing: Ndlovu's bills show that her meter readings continued to rise, along with her debt, even after Eskom tore the meter off her wall. Another Sowetan, Lindiwe Radebe, shows me a bill for almost \$2,000—an inconceivable amount, given that Radebe doesn't have any electrical appliances. We talk sitting on ripped-out minibus seats in an otherwise empty, bare-walled room. In the kitchen, a child kills ants next to an ancient potbellied stove. "I don't know how [the bill] could be so large," muses Radebe, a slow-moving, heavysset 38-year-old. "I don't have anything that uses electricity."

"There are billing inaccuracies," concedes Eskom spokeswoman Susan Chapman. "Our systems are not up to scratch. [But] inaccurate bills cannot be looked at in isolation. In some areas [of the townships], Eskom wasn't allowed in. So what did we do? We estimated. These no-go areas are opening up now. We anticipate another 18 months before Soweto is stabilized."

When asked about the SECC, Chapman at first refuses to comment, then says with a touch of irritation: "We deal with valid stakeholders only—not them. We never engage with them."

Collectively, Soweto owes Eskom more than \$100 million, and almost 90 percent of households are in arrears, according to a survey last year. Much of this debt dates back to the boycotts of the apartheid era, when residents refused to pay their bills in an attempt to undermine the apartheid regime. Though Eskom scrapped perhaps half of the apartheid debt, it insists that



## Eight years after apartheid's end, the 'struggle mentality' has returned. The difference now is the enemy: the ANC.

Soweto pay back the rest. Late last year, Eskom proposed a solution, offering to suspend half of each resident's debt—100 percent for pensioners—if they would agree not to connect illegally and to pay back the rest of their arrears within 12 months. Though the SECC objected—noting that the debt would merely be put off, not canceled—thousands of debtors signed the agreement.

Critics say Eskom's solution fails to address the real issue: The exorbitant cost of electricity for township dwellers. Black townships pay, on average, 30 percent more for electricity than their white suburban neighbors, who buy in greater quantities. Setshedi says of the plan: "It does nothing for the future. Even if you pay all of the money you owe, it's going to come back. You'll then accumulate the very same arrears, because the affordability is not being addressed."

**D**espite Eskom's suspension of cut-offs, the SECC is busier than ever. In fact, the SECC has usurped many of Eskom's duties in Soweto, doing routine maintenance work and even connecting those who have never had electricity. Now, there is also Operation Vulamanzi ("Water") for water cut-offs, and Operation Bueli-Ekhaya ("Go Back Home") for repossessed homes.

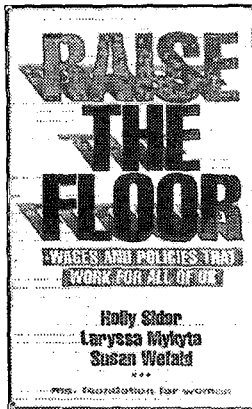
Following the rally in Diepkloof, Matseoane and Lubisi head out on their rounds. First stop is the home of Lydia Letebele, a 41-year-old with a moon face and a bright yellow head-wrap. The problem: Eskom technicians had run the power cable from the house next door along the side of Letebele's home and above her front door, when it could have run directly into the underground power line. The exposed cable is potentially dangerous, and Letebele tells me that an Eskom technician refused to fix it. She then asked a private electrician, who told her the job would cost \$3,000.

"This is an easy one," Matseoane says, chiding Eskom's shoddy workmanship. As a bonus, he tells Letebele, "We're going to remove this box entirely, so the power goes directly into the house and Eskom can't monitor it."

A few twists with the pliers and screwdriver, and the metering box is off, its place between the cables held by a piece of piping. Next, the superfluous cable—about 30 feet long—is stripped off the side of the house and coiled in the trunk of Matseoane's car. Lubisi says excitedly, "We'll connect six houses with that." ■

*Chris Smith is a freelance journalist and photographer who has worked in Africa, the Middle East and at home in the San Francisco Bay Area.*

## ON THE FRONTLINES



### Raise the Floor

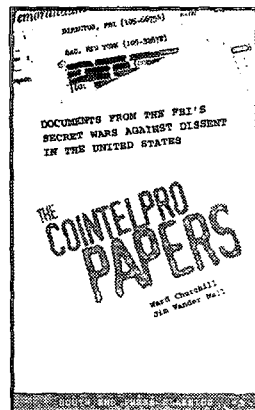
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LARYSSA MYKYTA,  
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Afterword by  
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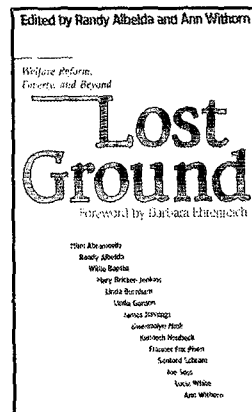
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# Always Running

By Joseph Nevins

**O**n April 6, 1996, a truck loaded with Mexican immigrants being chased by the U.S. Border Patrol lost control and crashed. Eight were killed and 17 injured. Three of those killed were

## Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail

By Ruben Martinez  
Metropolitan Books  
328 pages, \$26

brothers: Benjamin, Jaime and Salvador Chavez. They were returning to Watsonville, California, where they picked strawberries and where two other brothers—both documented immigrants—were living and working.

The brothers were added to a death toll of unauthorized immigrants crossing into the United States that has grown dramatically over the last several years. This is an outgrowth of the boundary's militarization—especially since the '90s—with growing numbers of Border Patrol agents, steel walls, lights and seismic sensors. The 1994 implementation of the federal government's Operation Gatekeeper in Southern California was the culmination of this process, but the roots of the build-up can be traced back to the late '70s.

The Chavez brothers' jobs in Watsonville, and the difficulty getting to them, is the paradox of a boundary increasingly open for commerce and a society with an often insatiable appetite for immigrant labor, combined with a border evermore difficult to traverse. "For decades the message has been: We have a job for you," writes Ruben Martinez. "Today it is: We have a job for you, but you'll have more trouble getting across the line."

**M**artinez's *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* chronicles the lives of the Chavez family, humanizing these "new Americans." Martinez writes beautifully, and his non-fiction account of the living ties between

Cheran—the Chavez family's hometown—and various locales in the United States reads like a fine novel.

Martinez sees Michoacan, the home state of the Chavez family, as having a past but little future. "Practically everyone" in the state "is getting the hell out—or coming back after having gotten the hell out." Growing awareness of an outside world, one made more attractive by television images and the tall tales of returning immigrants, only increases the desire to move. But "the movement is circular: You meet the future by moving out, render tribute to the past by coming back home to visit and spend your hard-earned American dollars."



JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ/FROM CROSSING OVER: A MEXICAN FAMILY ON THE MIGRANT TRAIL

In this regard, Cheran is typical. It is a town with poor soil, where the cultivation of corn and beans—for subsistence consumption—predominates. It has almost no exports and little industry—except for a modest amount of furniture

production, almost all of which is sold regionally. And because the timber supply is running out, even this small industry is threatened. For such reasons, people must leave. "To move is to live," Martinez writes. "To move is to head toward the

**"Practically everyone is getting the hell out—or coming back after having gotten the hell out."**

future. Working in the States not only elevates Cheran's economic status but also connects it, culturally, to the whirlwind of globalization."

Despite its relative isolation, Cheran has long been part of this "whirlwind" of transnational forces. Cheranes have deep roots in the United States; many of its sons and daughters have been in the U.S. military and have fought in World War II, Vietnam and the Gulf War. Basketball is the town's most popular sport, and the Chicago Bulls its most popular team—an outgrowth of the several hundreds of Cheranes living and working in Illinois. And parabolic antennas now allow those who stay behind—or return—to watch CNN, *The X-Files* or MTV. The effects of these developments on Cheran and its people are complex and multifaceted.

These ties—and the lure of a better life—push the Cheranes to continue to migrate. Even in the case of the Chavez family, the deaths of three sons do not extinguish the desire to move. Yet strong ties to their birthplace also pull them back, as demonstrated by the oldest Chavez daughter and her husband.

**T**he lives of the Chavezes and two other Cheran families north of the border are the focus of the second part of the book. Martinez likens migration to an earthquake, one that has profoundly affected virtually every family in Cheran "for better and for worse." The changes "follow fault lines extend-

ing from this highland town all the way to Arkansas and hundreds of other points north. It tears families apart and reunites them. It destroys an ancient language and creates a new one. It makes what is far away near, and what is near, far away."

The Tapias, now living in Warren, Arkansas, are one such family, as are the Enriquezes of Norwalk, Wisconsin. Their experiences—and more importantly, those of their children growing up in the United States—are greatly disrupting the boundaries of neat categories such as "American" and "Mexican." These "Mexicans" sometimes have southern drawls, listen to rap music, romance whites and blacks, and, in the process, redefine what it means to be American as well as Mexican.

Multiculturalism is no longer up for debate, Martinez demonstrates. It's a fact of life in the NAFTA era. "In the end, the joke will be on both the gringo and the Mexican guardians of reified notions of culture," he writes. "The kids will be neither Mexican nor gringo but both, and more than both, they will be the New Americans, imbibing cultures from all over the globe."

In these "New Americans," Martinez—the son of a second-generation Mexican-American father and a Salvadoran immigrant mother—sees himself: "I see their brownness, I see my own. ... They are doing exactly what my father's parents and my mother did. They are doing exactly what all Americans' forbears did."

Martinez concludes by noting that, when seen from an airplane, the line representing the U.S.-Mexico boundary is invisible. It is merely an idea. Yet it is also very real idea, and sometimes fatally so. This multifaceted boundary, one that simultaneously brings together and drives apart the peoples of the United States, Mexico and beyond, is what Martinez ultimately asks his readers to challenge. ■

Joseph Nevins is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (Routledge).

# Under the Radar

By Evan Endicott

Everywhere you turn, the secret is being whispered. In the aisles of independent record stores, where groove lovers congregate among dust-covered slabs of vinyl; in the neighborhoods of New York and Los Angeles,

While Eminem recycles Aerosmith tunes and Jay-Z squeezes the last drops of soul out of Bobby Bland, innovative "undie" producers are employing vintage vinyl, digital software and live instruments to create new classics.

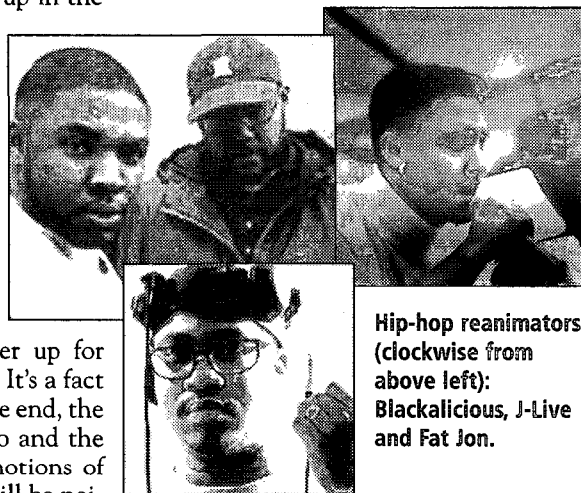
Take Fat Jon, a Bay Area producer with a knack for putting everything in its right place. His new LP, *Wave Motion*, combines slow-burning jazz-funk with ethereal trumpet solos, phased guitars, swirling keyboard licks and haunting vocal samples. His grooves are neither as complex nor as challenging as DJ Shadow's (with whom he is often compared), but for listeners craving head-nodding soul in a melancholy vein, Fat Jon supplies satori through simplicity.

A more ambitious, trippy and downright bizarre instrumental voyage spans the 19 tracks on *Angles Without Edges*, the debut LP from Yesterday's New Quintet. Billed as a jazz-meets-hip hop jam session among mysterious players with names like "Malik Flavors," YNQ is the musical brainchild of L.A. producer Madlib. Juggling a mind-boggling array of vintage instruments, Madlib whips up a '70s-flavored melange of jazzy improvisation and inventively programmed beats.

At the other end of the spectrum, Atlanta's Prefuse 73 mixes experimental, glitch-infused computer programming with the "beats first" aesthetic of hip hop to create completely idiosyncratic instrumentals. On his latest EP, *The '92 VS '02 Collection*, complex keyboard melodies surf fearlessly over steadily evolving electro-breaks, while minute vocal samples are woven into intricate webs of rhythm and sound.

But what about the words? When rap first emerged, it was a venue for the voiceless, the neglected residents of America's inner cities. Seminal artists KRS-One and Public Enemy rapped about a world most white Americans had never bothered to notice. They were confrontational, angry and, above all, honest.

Today, rap lyrics resemble a twisted



Hip-hop reanimators (clockwise from above left): Blackalicious, J-Live and Fat Jon.

where hip hop has shaped two generations of youth; on college radio and in cyberspace, the words are heard and seen. "Hip hop is dead."

How can this be? After all, hip hop, a "fad" born in the Bronx two decades ago, has weathered the media's ceaseless attacks to become the dominant form of pop music. Rap's mainstream acceptance, enabled by multi-platinum pretenders MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice, created a cottage industry that comprises not only albums, but stadium tours, film franchises and fashion imprints.

Yet the secret persists, winding its way through smoky nightclubs and streetcorner ciphers. Hip hop remains alive in name only—a brand like any other. As a voice of dissent against "Amerikkkan" culture, it has ceased to function. These days, P. Diddy proclaims, "Don't worry if I write rhymes / I write checks," and listeners nod their heads in agreement.

But for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Hip hop's underground, much maligned after years of in-fighting and self-obsession, is showing signs of renewed vitality. The first element of this renaissance is musical.



fusion of the *Robb Report* and hardcore porn, holding conspicuous consumption and sexual conquest in equally high regard. Jay-Z drives a Bentley and spends summer "lampin' in the Hamptons," while Nelly prefers "fuckin' lesbian twins now." Hip hop is moving backwards, having traded real life for the phallogocentric fantasy Hugh Hefner patented in the '50s.

New York group Company Flow opted out of this charade back in 1997, declaring themselves "independent as fuck" and deconstructing the American mythos on venomous tracks such as "Patriotism." Though their moment was short-lived, group member El-P went on to form Definitive Jux, a record label whose artists are emblematic of the underground's return to socially conscious lyrics.

On his debut solo LP, *Fantastic Damage*, El-P spits razor-sharp rhymes over bombastic beats built from white noise, distorted synths and unidentifiable blasts of sonic violence. Incredibly, El-P's flow is as intense as his music—a dendrite-dense stream of consciousness that sounds senseless at first but is poetically precise once deciphered.

El-P rhymes as if trying to exorcise his thoughts upon formation, and with good reason—his thoughts are often terrifying. On "Stepfather Factory," he imagines a company that manufactures abusive android surrogates. Brilliant allusions swim through his murky sentences: Americans are "Simple headed vagrants / Trying to chase where Forrest's feather went;" El-P is "Monkey number one million / Flipping Tempest texts." Accidental genius or no, *Fantastic Damage* is the 21st century's first hip hop masterpiece.

While El-P conjures America's dystopian future, fellow New Yorker J-Live brings the present into sharp focus on his album *All of the Above*. A literate, passionate tirade against the industry pimps and music moguls who have "turned hip hop to a get-rich-quick scheme," *Above* skewers thugged-out MCs who "keep it real" by imitating the movie mobsters in *Goodfellas*.

Many underground MCs focus on fixing hip hop because they lack the vision to address the bigger picture. Fortunately, J-Live's eyes are wide open. *Above* is a State of the Union Address, delivered with more candor and heart than any president

could muster. On "Satisfied," J-Live rhymes: "The poor get worked / The rich get richer / The world gets worse / Do you get the picture?" Addressing America's recent adoption of patriotism as fashion statement, he observes, "Now it's all about NYPD caps and Pentagon bumper stickers / But yo, you still a nigger."

A coast away, Blackalicious draw similar conclusions on their major label debut *Blazing Arrow*. From the blackest streets to the Whitest House in the land, MC Gift of Gab captures the fall of the American Empire in chilling detail: "Liquor stores upon every corner and younger people done accepted defeat / In the melting pot the lava's seeping and the hood is all the mind can conceive / ... The cops is the Klan and the planet's run by a government of genocidal thieves."

Fortunately, Blackalicious and J-Live buttress these dark treatises with bouncy, sun-soaked songs that celebrate life's

pleasures—friends, family and hip hop itself. Less optimistic, but no less funky, is Oakland's The Coup, a pair of Marxist revolutionaries who drop communist theory over rump-shaking instrumentals.

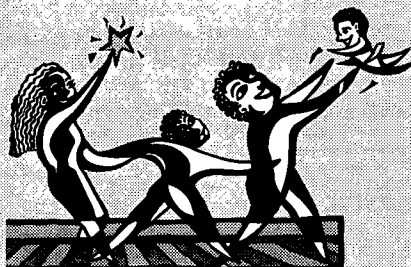
On "5 Million Ways to Kill a CEO," (from the LP *Party Music*) MC Boots Riley sums up America's captains of industry in three brilliant lines: "They own sweat shops, pet cops and fields of cola / Murder babies with their molar on the areola / Control the Pope, Dalai Lama, Holy Rollers and the Ayatollah."

Over the next few years, the secret of hip hop's demise will reach everybody's ears. But when consumers move on to the next trend, the underground will still thrive. If today's crop of artists is any indication, it will be a resurrection well worth listening to. ■

Evan Endicott is a freelance music writer in Los Angeles.

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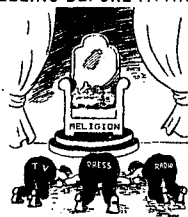
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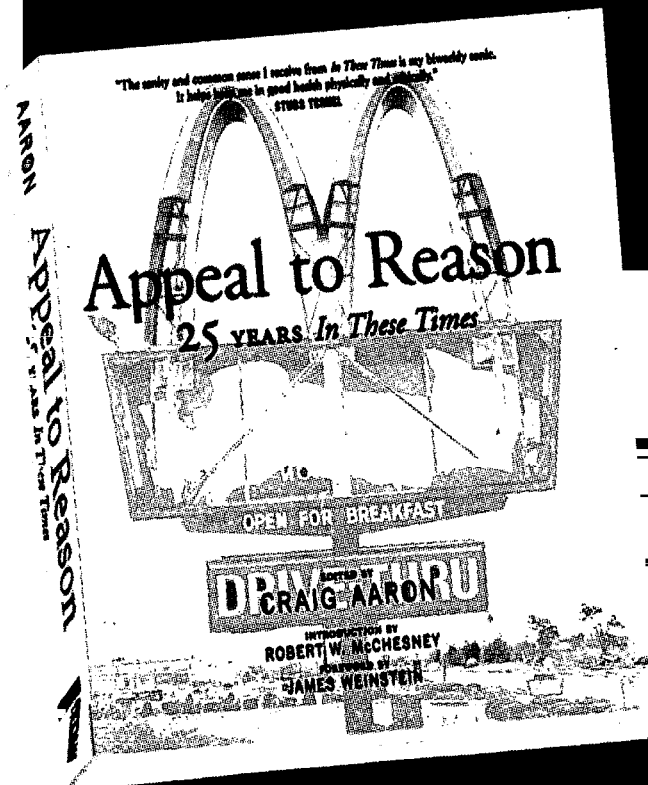
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